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Guitar & Bass

Stevie Ray Vaughan

The Texas blues legend's turbulent life and enduring legacy

PLUS!
Taylor
Johnny A
Vigier
Laurence Jones
and more...

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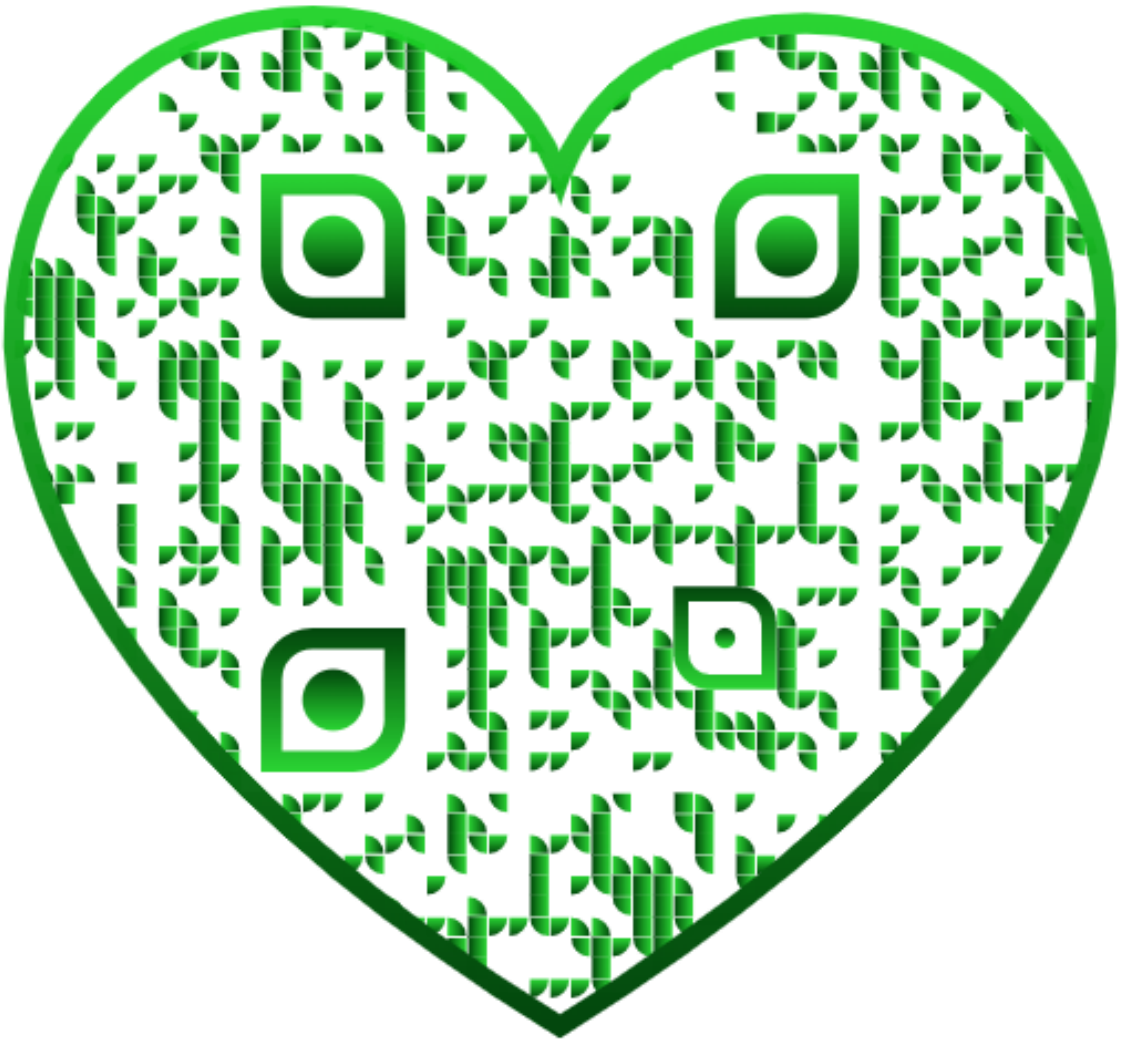
Vintage Les Pauls!

Kossoff, Keef, Green – and Phil Harris

Private Collection

From near-death to guitar redemption



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Mystic 3-Color Sunburst (HSS)

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Concert Photo: Dave Jones (Empire West Live)

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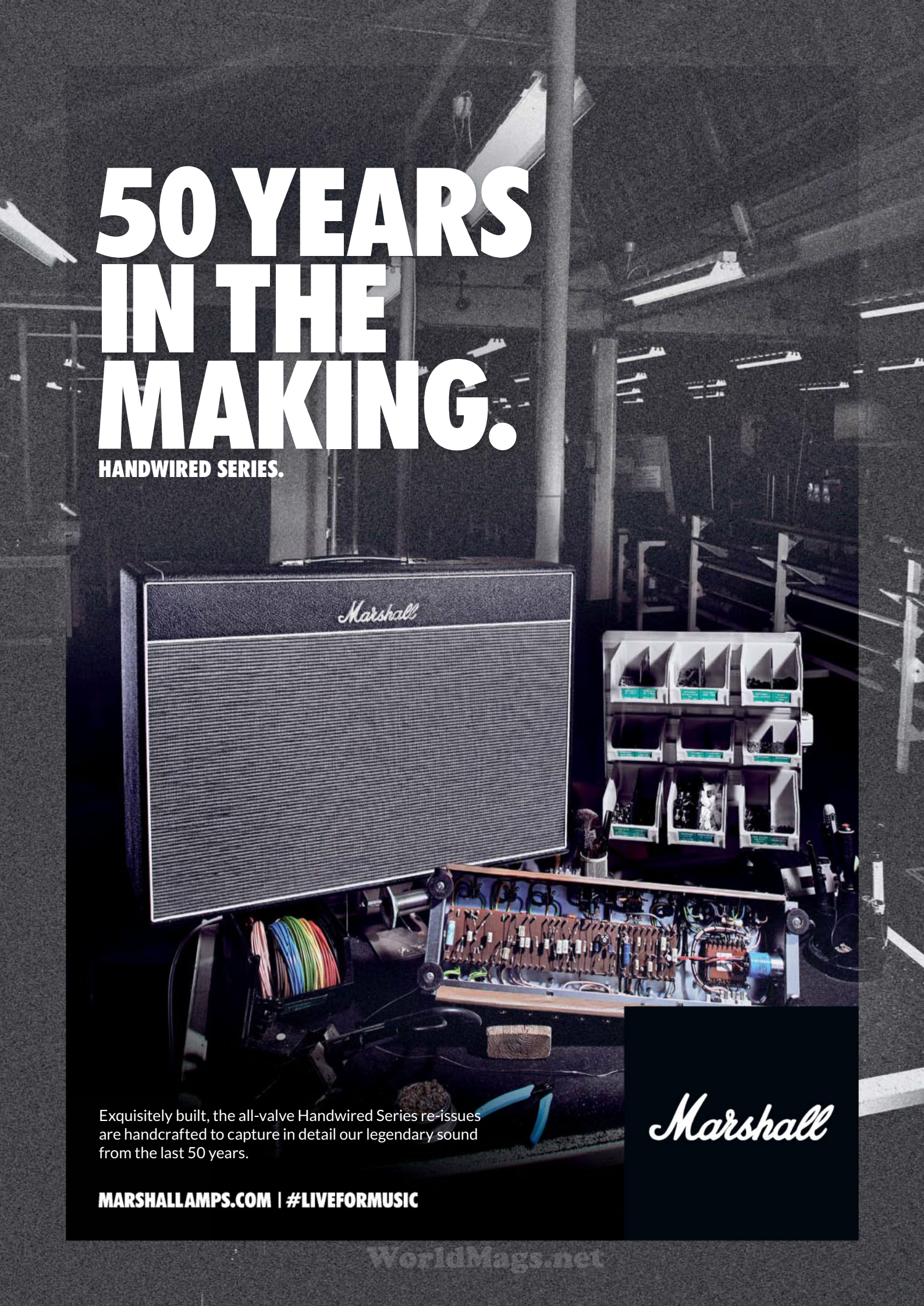

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Guitar & Bass

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Subscriptions & Back Issues **Guitar & Bass Magazine**
https://anthem.subscribeonline.co.uk
Tel **0844 322 1291 (UK)**
Tel: **Call Toll Free 800 428 3003 (US)**
Tel **+44 (0) 1795 414 781 (Rest of World)**
Email **guitarandbass@servicehelpline.co.uk**
Price (12 issues) **£51 (UK), £64 (Europe/Republic Of Ireland), $99 (USA), £72 (Rest of World)**
See page 92 for subscription details

Printed by Polestar UK Print Ltd
Tel +44 (0) 1582 678 900

Distributed by **Marketforce (UK) Ltd,**
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London SE1 0SU Tel **+44 (0) 203 148 3000**

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Anthem Publishing was established in 2003 and publishes Guitar & Bass, Music Tech Magazine, Music Tech Focus, Classic Pop and Vintage Rock.
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Vaughan To Be Wild...

Regardless of your personal tastes and favourites, I'm sure we can agree that any conversation regarding the best guitar players of all time – especially when you're talking about anything blues-related – must include Stevie Ray Vaughan. The main reason for this month's cover is an unashamed desire to ensure that the man is never forgotten; not through nostalgia, you understand, but because he was so damn good. Please take the time to read this month's SRV feature, listen to the man's music, and let us know what you think.

Two Gibson Les Pauls feature in the reviews section this month, accompanied by guitars from Taylor, Vigier and even the Brian May Bass. If you're looking for LPs of a vintage hue then Phil Harris has you covered, as he recalls a recent Les Paul summit at the North West Guitar Show that blew his mind. There's also a Private Collection story that'll warm the cockles of your cockles – if it doesn't, then check your pulse (or the place where your soul should be). Throw in some fine tuition features as well as other staples of *G&B* wholesomeness and we hope it sustains you during the coming month.

Remember, if you're looking for a website to browse during some precious free time, you can always mosey on down that internet highway to www.guitar-bass.net, where you'll be met with the warmest of welcomes...

John

In this issue

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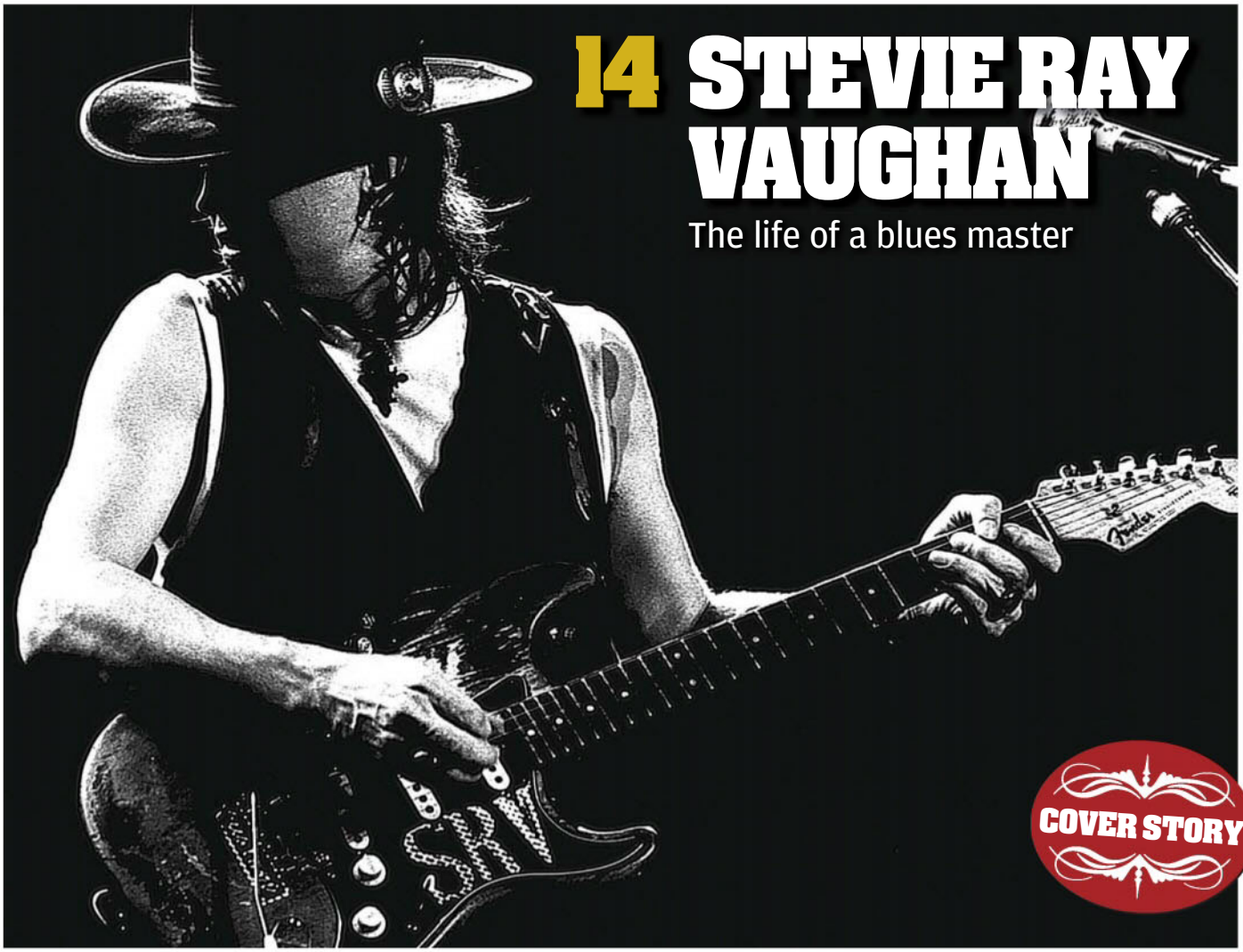

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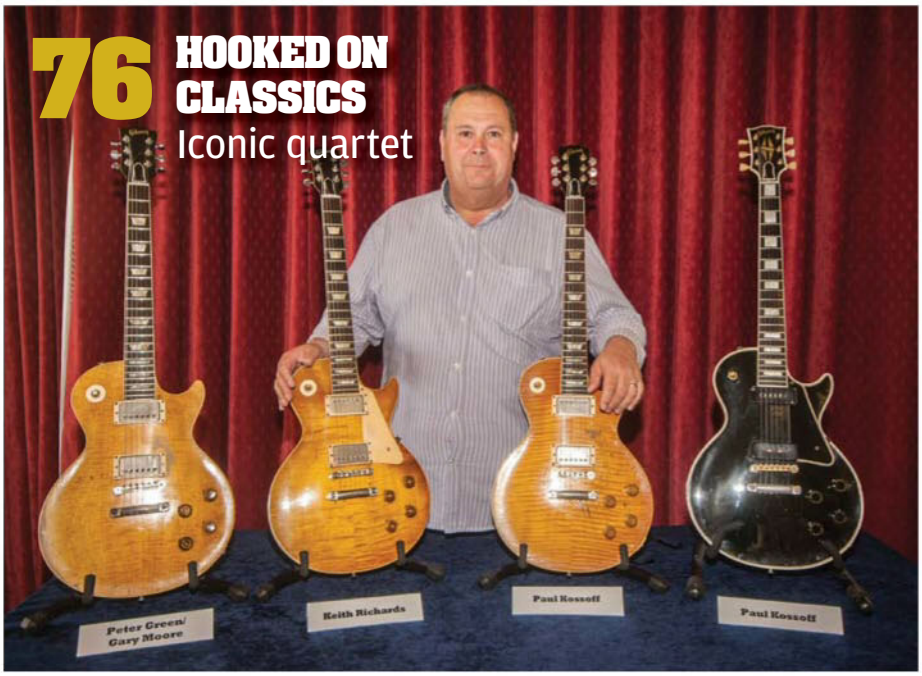

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Cover photo: Dalle / Retna Pictures

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Nigel Barker thought he'd never play again – and then a motorcycle came to his rescue...

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Reverberations

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Please note, we reserve the right to edit where we feel it is appropriate, or to print extracts from longer correspondences

State Bar Blues Band: longest-running jam band in the UK?

STAR LETTER

STAYING POWER

Some considerable time ago I was approached to be a part of the house band at a new blues jam which was starting on a Tuesday night in The State Bar in Holland Street in Glasgow. Of course I said 'yes' and imagined it would be lucky to run for a month or two. Those months rolled into years and then decades, while every week – rain, hail, snow and (very occasionally) sun – The State Bar Blues Jam just keeps going. We have now recently celebrated our 18th anniversary. It's still the same line-up... and we haven't fallen out yet!

Over these years we have been host to droves of musicians from all over the world, including a number of notables. And it's not just locals who come to watch; many hundreds of foreign tourists have been directed to 'Tuesday at the State' by word of mouth. Now, it's reached a point where we are wondering if there any other jams which have become this established and had such a long unbroken run. We would love to lay claim to the title of 'the longest running Blues Jam in the country!' Is there anybody out there who can tell us we are mistaken? Remember, the jam must be weekly and it must be an unchanged line-up!

Al Fleming (The State Bar Blues Band) *via email*

G&B **First off, Al, congratulations to yourself and the rest of the band for such longevity. We know how harsh audiences can be on occasion, so we're certain that you've not held down the gig for so long just because there's nothing on the telly on a Tuesday night... and the idea of having an unchanged band will seem like heaven to many reading this. If we counted up the amount of time spent finding and/or replacing musicians to keep the band going it would no doubt add up to a greater percentage of our lives than is healthy. Finally, we love a good gauntlet here at *G&B*, and Al's thrown down a fine one: if you think your band has the beating of his, please let us know (preferably with photographic evidence).**

Rosetti

Written a Star Letter? Contact Rosetti on 01376 550033 to claim your Rickenbacker goodie bag

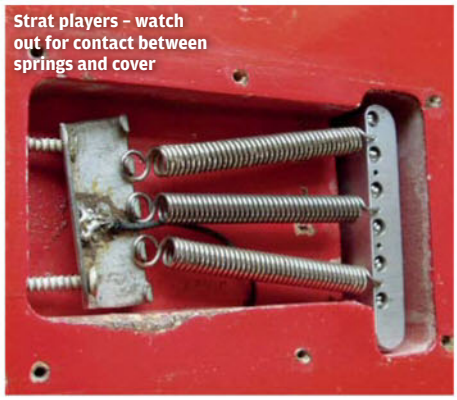
TREM EXPERIMENTS

While out shopping with the kids the other day I was drawn to your July 2014 issue, as I have been tinkering with my trusty Squier for a while and was interested to see what the guitar community were doing to Strats these days.

I recently got a very talented guitar tech friend of mine to fit a two-point trem, which he did, and the guitar played very well. However, after messing around for a few days it became obvious that the guitar was not as good as it used to be. The sustain, which had been amazing before, was greatly reduced, and treble response was quite dull.

This set me on a path of forensically anal investigation of the Strat. I bought a *Haynes Strat Manual* off eBay, read stuff online and tried some experiments of my own. I concluded that the trem claw, and perhaps even the springs, have to be made of a suitably resonant material in order to create that twangy reverb spring resonance, or you don't get a true Fender tone.

For example, if you take a trem claw and hang it on a bit of thread, then strike it with a tent peg or



Strat players – watch out for contact between springs and cover

similar metal object (think of the school orchestra triangle playing), it will ring. The one I have now condemned went 'thunk'! My experiments continue (but the school hols are a comin').

The trem cover myth may actually be true. If you look at the claw screws, they go into the body at an angle. If any of the concealed parts are proud of the body – and you can test this by moving the long edge of the cover across the whole narrow aperture of the routing – nothing should contact the cover. If it does, the cover will dampen the springs when fitted and kill the resonant ring of the whole guitar, a bit like the soft pedal on a piano.

It might be safer to modify everything to eliminate this fouling and create a clearance rather than take the cover off permanently, particularly if you play semi-naked. I can imagine the howling cries of pain as my extra flesh bonds with the trem springs. Ouch!

Graham Tait *via email*

G&B **Sound advice, Graham, although we wouldn't recommend anyone outside, perhaps, the Red Hot Chili Peppers playing semi-naked. Don't get us wrong, we're all for personal freedom – we just don't recommend it, that's all. But we digress from the main point; we're off to conduct our own experiments in search of the perfect vibrato set-up, so many thanks, Graham.**

THE GUITARIST'S LOT?

I'm writing to you as part of an English class assignment, where we have to write to a relevant magazine about a subject we care about. I'm 14 years old and have been playing guitar for two years. I've tried to start a band with friends but it's been hard because they expect me to sort out everything, including where to play, what to play, sort out lifts and some of the gear. I talked to the man working at our rehearsal studio and he said that it's natural for the guitar player to organise everything. Is this true? I hope not.

Daniel Savarese *via email*

G&B **If only they had that kind of homework when we were at school. Appreciate you choosing us, and we hope you get extra marks for getting your letter published.**

You raise an interesting question. You don't mention whether you're the singer or songwriter as well; if that is the case then it's natural you'd end up being the band's driving force, if not necessarily the only practical organiser. The fact that you're actually trying to start a band leaves you open to organising everything, but there's no actual rule we know about that states guitar players have to organise everything.

If you look at the positives of your situation, then you can see some joys from being in charge. For a start, you can decide what songs to play, and who is in the band. That said, we know your frustrations all too well about playing with people who aren't that bothered (or aren't that fussed about getting better).

Our advice for the moment is to stick with it; any playing or band experience you get now that doesn't actually kill your love of playing will stand you in good stead in years to come. If you really want to just turn up and play, ask around your local rehearsal studios and guitar shops about any bands that need a guitar player. You can always try the wanted ads (either in print or online). The most important thing at your age (or indeed any age) is to keep playing and enjoying it. Good luck with it all.

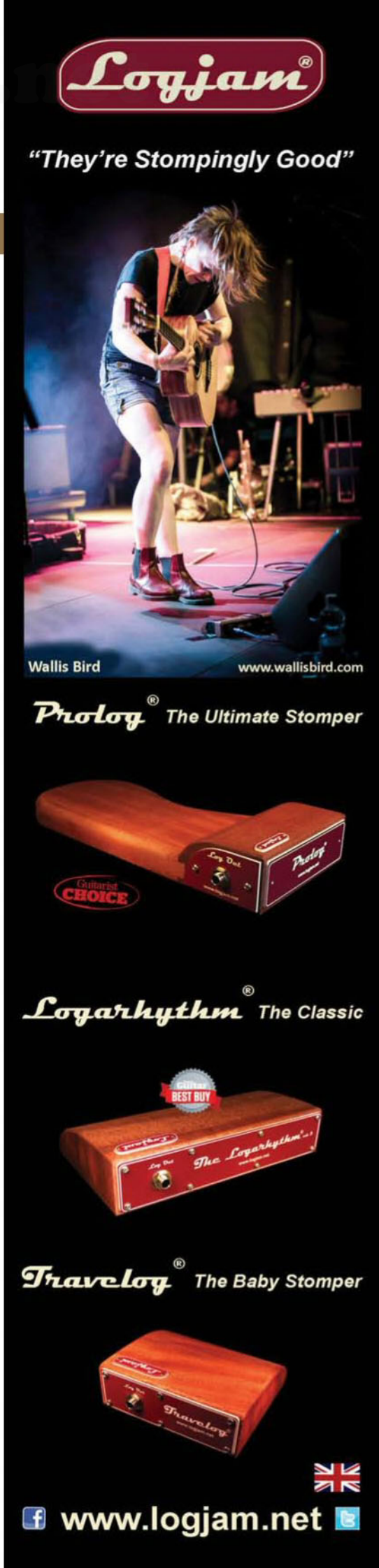
RIGHT SAID FRED

Congratulations to the *Guitar & Bass* team for a fine article on whammy. Bravo! To that comprehensive history of vibrato article, *Pitch Invasion* by Michael Heatley in the current issue of *Guitar & Bass Magazine*, we'd like to offer the following: Paul Adelbert 'PA' Bigsby certainly played a key role in the development of the guitar vibrato and we thank Michael for including him and his legacy in his article. As all guitar vibratos work under the same set of principles, his article did a nice job of explaining the timeline and differences between the major types on the market (and that it's technically 'vibrato' and not 'tremolo'!). Being among the first vibratos available, Paul Bigsby's sleek, simple, and functional designs still resonate with players today. Although not designed to 'dive-bomb', what sets a Bigsby apart from other vibratos is its subtle ability to mimic the human voice and to create that unmistakable 'wobble'. To this end, we're very happy that you included Duane Eddy, Lonnie Mack, and Merle Travis as artists who helped shape the history of this unique sound.

Virtually unchanged from the original 1950s design, we are proud to carry the torch for Paul Bigsby and offer his legendary designs to a new generation. Many thanks for your great and informative article! Keep up the great work.

Fred W Gretsch, President, The Gretsch Company *via email*

G&B **Thanks for your kind words, Fred. We're sure that whether you call it 'whammy', 'tremolo' or 'vibrato', players are going to be using it to enhance their playing – and our lives – for years to come.**



Woke up this mornin'... NEWS

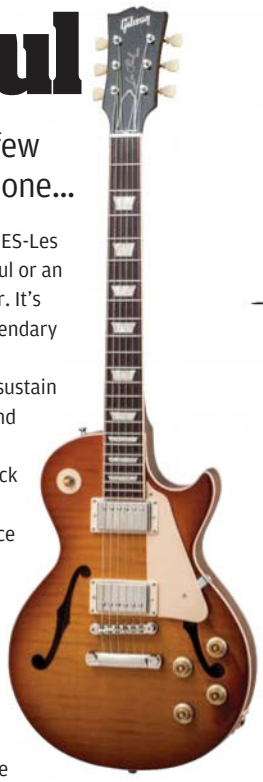
The ES-Les Paul

We saw the Les Paul Florentine in the '90s, even a few Epi Les Pauls with air inside, but here comes a new one...

Gibson has married together two of its best-known designs to create the ES-Les Paul. It's far more, the company says, than merely a chambered Les Paul or an ES-335 shrunk down to Lester proportions; this is an entirely new guitar. It's the result of a painstaking assessment of what makes each of these legendary models special by the skilled luthiers at Gibson Memphis.

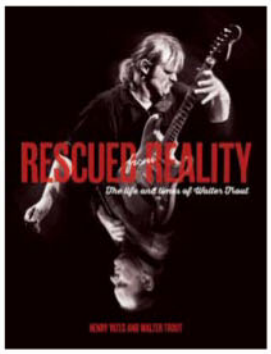
A weight-relieved solid mahogany centre block is there to promote enhanced sustain and feedback reduction, while the three-ply maple/basswood/maple top, back and sides bring the special resonating characteristics of the semi-solid guitar to the party. Top bracing is spruce. It's all built from lightweight materials, while the neck is one-piece mahogany with a modified 1959 profile. Pickups are MHS Unpotted Humbuckers with an Alnico II at the neck and an Alnico III at the bridge. The choice of finishes is light burst (£2149) or black top (£1999).

If a more traditional Les Paul is your desire then Gibson's limited run Collectors Choice series is keeping them coming. The Collector's Choice #28 STP Burst is a reproduction of the 1958 sunburst owned and played by Ronnie Montrose; the guitar was passed on to session man Peter Weihe, who then played it on a massive amount of recordings, and it has the 'full' '58 neck profile and aged nickel hardware including two Custom Buckers made to the precise specs of the original guitar's PAFs. The Collectors Choice #12 is a recreation of the 1957 Goldtop owned by CEO of Gibson Brands Henry Juszkiewicz. This particular guitar features lightly-wound humbuckers, which Gibson says offer outstanding definition and clarity, yet thickness and body too. Both guitars will be available in a limited run of 300 or less.



Trout Tome

Rescued From Reality – The Life And Times Of Walter Trout **is the result of 30-plus hours of interviews conducted by British writer Henry Yates. It combines Trout's testimony with never-before-seen photos from his personal archive. Walter gives a frank, unflinching and funny account of his chequered life and times – the hits, misses, homelessness, death threats, the demeaning depths of his addictions and the reality of his recent serious health issues. After a successful liver transplant in June, Walter is still fighting for his life after a series of infections have taken him back to hospital. We wish him a speedy recovery.**



LYME REGIS: GUITARS ON THE BEACH

Deep Purple legend Ian Gillan is to lead an attempt to smash the world record for 'the greatest number of guitarists simultaneously playing one song together' on Lyme Regis beach on September 6. The choice of song? What else but *Smoke On The Water,* of course. The event has been dubbed 'Guitars On The Beach', and when Gillan got wind of it, he offered his services as singer. 'Now that Ian's onboard, we may need a bigger beach,' quipped organiser Geoff Baker.

Guitars On The Beach was launched last year and drew 2,267 guitarists of all ages and abilities to Lyme from all over the UK, setting a record as Britain's Biggest Band as they performed Buddy Holly's hit *Rave On,* led by Lyme-schooled actor Billy Geraghty, who played Buddy in the West End musical.

The ultimate target to beat is 6,546, set in Poland in 2009. To sign up – it's free – go to www.guitarsonthebeach.co.uk.

Edge and Bono made Fender board members

In an astounding move, U2's guitarist The Edge and outspoken frontman Bono have been made bonafide members of the board of directors at Fender. Fender co-chairman Mark Fukunaga had this to say on the appointment: 'The Edge's track record as a guitarist and an innovator of unique sounds through his use of technology makes him an ideal partner to grow Fender's brand. Bono is a visionary in the music world who also has business acumen and creativity that will help Fender thrive.' Just how much day-to-day involvement the pair will have in major decision-making remains unclear, but if deemed a success, where could this lead? Kanye West an advisor at Gibson? Lady Gaga running Marshall? The mind boggles.

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PROTECT MUSIC EDUCATION

MUSIC EDUCATION UNDER THREAT

Government funding for music education is to be slashed unless we all kick up an almighty fuss. It's not often that we take a political stance here at *Guitar & Bass* but we do believe that musical education of all sorts is important – almost a basic right as far as any schooling goes. Yet according to the organisation Protect Music Education, the Department Of Education has launched a consultation that recommends that local authorities stop funding music services, saying that there are other sources of funding available. In the document the DoE explains that this funding could come from 'music education hubs and from school budgets' but what it fails to explain, according to PME, is why these hubs have already had their funding slashed from £82.5m to £58m in 2014/15.

As with most consultations these days, there is a 'response procedure' available which we would urge anyone who agrees to take part in. Simply visit the website www.protectmusiceducation.org for more information, videos and tweets, and click the Protect Music Education tab to find out more information and how to respond. It's very easy, with templates already set-up and email addresses supplied. You can also join the campaign as an individual or as an organisation. If you are an individual, all you need to do is join on the sign-up page; if you represent an organisation, just send a quote and logo to henry.vann@ism.org, who will put it online to demonstrate your support. Once again, all the information is over at www.protectmusiceducation.org.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Jimmy Page Book

Simple entitled *Jimmy Page*, this book is actually the first-ever from any member of Led Zeppelin. It's been described as a photographic essay with 600 pictures and 500 pages, all curated and captioned by Jimmy himself. It's a definitive visual record of a remarkable life. Available from October; see www.jimmypagebook.com

BB King's Lucille Turns 65

Outside of the Les Paul itself there can't be many signature electric guitars with the longevity of Lucille, BB King's f-hole-less ES-355 – and of course there's a new model to mark the happy event of Lucille's 65th birthday. Hardware includes 490R and 490T humbuckers in the neck and bridge respectively to power the six-way Varitone and stereo output options, and you can have any colour you like... just as long as it's ebony.

JHS: The Main Event

***Guitar & Bass* attended the annual John Hornby Skewes 'Event' recently held in June at the company's headquarters in Garforth near Leeds to bring you up to date info on new guitar-related products about to hit the shops.**

Vintage guitars displayed its reissue V100MU. 'MU' denotes 'Midge Ure', and the guitar looks fab with a cool gold top over a carved solid mahogany body, while a Wilkinson-designed GBR Roller Bridge ensures the smooth and accurate performance of the old-school vibrola system.

Italia never fails to raise eyebrows. Both the new sci-fi themed Maranello Xf and Xr (both pictured) are no exception: the bodies are korina, with sculpted synthetic urethane tops, while hardware includes a pair of hybrid, active humbuckers. As for acoustics, Pilgrim impressed with the Mayflower Deluxe (also pictured above), a contoured, fibreglass-backed, solid cedar-topped single-cutaway electro-acoustic. Electrics include Fishman's Presys + system with a Sonicore pickup.

From blues to rock, original Supro amps were responsible for some of the sounds produced by Jimi Hendrix, Jimmy Page and Albert Lee. These USA-made valve combos are now available in three reissue models, the 1x15" Thunderbolt (pictured below), the 1x12" Dual Tone and the 2x10" Coronado. Still in the amp room, the 18W 1x10" Tubemeister 18 from Hughes and Kettner serves up three individual sounds at the touch of a footswitch with tons of headroom ranging from sparkling cleans to crunch and rich overdrive distortion. It also comes with a handy boost feature for solos.

Xvive compact effect pedals (pictured above) could be good if space is a problem on your pedalboard. With 14 models in the range, these rugged metal-bodied units have true bypass switching and should cater for just about every sound enhancement you might need.

Finally, a set of Thunderplugs are the ideal way to maintain clarity when listening or playing loud music while ensuring eardrums protection. Expect to see these available in bubblegum-style machines at venues soon.

Oh, and got any old credit cards lying around? If you have, turn them into plectrums with Pick Punch, a heavy duty tool for making traditional heart shape plectrums from plastic sheets. More info to be had by visiting www.jhs.co.uk.

Calendar SHOWS, GIGS, FESTIVALS, WORKSHOPS

Upton Blues Festival
18-20 JULY

Nearly 100 gigs over the weekend, three main stages and 10 pub stages: Larry Miller Band, Rosco Levee & the Southern Slide, Laurence Jones...
WHERE? **In and around the pubs and streets of Upton upon Severn, Worcestershire**
TICKETS **All free**
CONTACT **www.uptonbluesfestival.org.uk**

Richard Thompson
20 JULY-1 AUGUST & 22-31 AUGUST

One of the greatest guitarists these isles have produced heads out on a solo acoustic tour
WHERE? **16 gigs across the country**
TICKETS **From £27**
CONTACT **http://richardthompson-music.com**

Black Star Riders
18-24 JULY & 5-7 AUGUST

Scott Gorham's new band, which is essentially his latest Thin Lizzy line-up, rock in a Lizzy-esque style
WHERE? **Nine dates across the country**
TICKETS **From £22.50**
CONTACT **http://blackstarriders.com**

London Acoustic Guitar Show
13-14 SEPTEMBER

All the latest acoustic kit plus Tony McManus, Jon Gomm and Squeeze and now also featuring 'Electric Live' with Doug Aldrich and Bernie Marsden
WHERE? **Olympia Conference Centre, London**
TICKETS **Advance £20, on the door £25**
CONTACT **www.londonacousticguitarshow.com**

The 25th Great British R&B Festival
22-25 AUGUST

The Yardbirds, Eric Burdon & The Animals, Dr Feelgood, Andy Fairweather Low, Eric Sardinas...
WHERE? **Colne, Lancashire**
TICKETS **Early bird £105, day tickets from £27.50**
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Album reviews

Brian Setzer
ROCKABILLY RIOT! ALL ORIGINAL
Surfdog

All those who've been praying to the rockabilly gods have had those fervent wishes answered, as His Rockin' Majesty Brian Setzer returns with 12 new cuts. Songs about engines, cruel women, and '45s? Oh yes, and with Brian Setzer's heart-

stoppingly scuzzy guitar histrionics – aided and abetted by a kick-ass band – the appropriately-titled *Rockabilly Riot!* will take the roof of your stereo and your house.

Bernie Marsden
SHINE
Mascot/Provogue

Given his history as a player and songwriter you'd imagine there aren't many goals for Marsden, but *Shine* may well be his best yet. The sheer lifeforce he brings to cuts such as *Hoxie Rollin' Time* can't be ignored, and Marsden weaves blues and a

thousand shades of classic rock (from heavy to radio-friendly) with aplomb. Recorded at Abbey Road, Marsden's latest is a worthy addition to that studio's history.

Oz Noy
TWISTED BLUES VOL 2
Abstract Logix

'If you don't understand the blues, I just don't think what you're playing will sound as good,' claims guitar player and composer Oz Noy. On this collection, with the help of top-notch musicians including Double Trouble's Chris

Layton and Roscoe Beck, he displays how funk, jazz, bebop and soul (to name but some) all come from, and are infused with the blues. It's worth a proper listen.

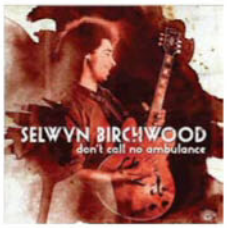
J Mascis
TIED TO A STAR
Sub Pop

Often held up by indie fans of a certain age as the last word in guitar soloing back in his Dinosaur Jr days, Mascis has never been afraid of showing his more tender, acoustic-focused side, and it's thoroughly on display on his latest solo album. Yes,

there's some fuzzy, collapsing electric work on display, but a lot of the tracks on here are powered by some fine melancholic picking or some surprisingly jaunty strumming.

Selwyn Birchwood
DON'T CALL NO AMBULANCE
Alligator

Florida's rising young blues star has won a lot of accolades, including walking away with last year's International Blues Challenge as well as the Albert King Guitarist Of The Year award, and his debut album goes a long way to reaching his blistering



live reputation. When Birchwood goes ballistic you're worried that his pickup coils are going is going to catch fire, while his ability to go slow and lonesome belies his youth.

Richard Durrant
CYCLING MUSIC
Long Man

The album title and cover indicate Durrant's firm love of two wheels, while the press release describes the record as 'think Steve Reich meets *Tubular Bells* meets Bradley Wiggins'. To be fair the atmospheric, minimalist acoustic soundscapes the

make up *Cycling Music* make that a fair description, but it's a rather warm and lovable record that dusts the cobwebs from your mind and inserts some fine melodies.

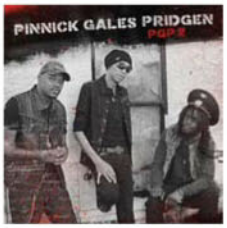
Richard Thompson
ACOUSTIC CLASSICS
Proper

Without naming names, some 'acoustic version' albums really aren't worth the effort. Not the case here: apart from tracks such as *Wall Of Death* and *1952 Vincent Black Lightning* being so darned good, Richard Thompson is a truly inventive

acoustic player. In fact, get the original versions and use both them and this record as a masterclass in translating songs to a solo acoustic. It'll be well worth your time.

Pinnick, Gales, Pridgen
PGP 2
Magna Carta

After the success of the first collaboration between guitar tour-de-force Eric Gales, former Mars Volta drummer Pridgen and King's X bassist/vocalist Pinnick, they return with another set of high-octane, strange-yet-accessible rock.



Plenty of the riffage on here can be described as 'muscular', but it's all wonderfully off-set by angular and inventive parts that add plenty of aural depth.

Yes
HEAVEN & EARTH
Frontiers

The prog-rock legends return with (most importantly, given the nature of our magazine) Steve Howe and Chris Squire on board. With veteran producer Roy Thomas Baker at the controls, *Heaven & Earth* is stuffed with classic

Yes melodies to satisfy those for whom happiness is a warm *Tales From Topographic Oceans* – and, in particular, Howe's playing is a real sonic treat.

SNAP JUDGEMENTS

Jarekus Singleton
REFUSE TO LOSE
Alligator
Some cracking modern blues that doffs a respectful cap at all three guitar Kings at times without slavishly copying anyone

Philip Sayce
INFLUENCE
Provogue
A blues-rock guitarist lauded by many of his peers, thsose of you new to the Sayce's charms would be wise to spend some quality time with this album

Red Butler
FREEDOM BOUND
Red Butler Music
These Sussex blues-rockers confirm their status as rising young stars of the scene with some wonderfully deft fretwork that gives us all hope

Marillion
A SUNDAY NIGHT ABOVE THE RAIN
EAR Music
When a band with Marillion's gigging reputation releases a live record, it's likely to be a good 'un. And – don't worry – it is

Rainbows Are Free
WAVES AHEAD OF THE OCEAN
Guestroom
The opening track is *Speed God And The Rise Of The Motherfuckers From A Place Beyond Hell*. Righty-ho...

King Creosote
FROM SCOTLAND WITH LOVE
Domino
Released as an audio accompaniment to a documentary, this is an epic collection of evocative sonics that's grand for the soul

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Mike Clement - Toni Iommi & Iron Maiden

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Drew Foppe - Fleetwood Mac & Deftones

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Guitar Hurricane

Stevie Ray Vaughan came from 'nowhere', made a massive mark, impressed an older generation and also introduced young players to the blues. Despite his early death, SRV's legacy lives on, as **Michael Stephens** discovers...

On October 3 2014, Stevie Ray Vaughan would have turned 60 years old. But as y'all know, age ain't nuthin' but a number when it comes to playing blues: BB King and Eric Clapton, veterans of two very different roots and eras, continue to produce great work and live performances; Albert King, Albert Collins, John Lee Hooker and many others kept delivering the goods until the good Lord came a-callin'. Stevie Ray never had the chance to prove all he was capable of – he was killed in a helicopter crash in 1990, aged 35, in a pro career that spanned less than a decade.

Although praised in his lifetime and lauded in the years after his death, some believe SRV has fallen 'off the map' of guitar legends in recent years. Some might even think Stevie was a flash-in-the pan of the '80s blues revival – but many still believe that Stevie Ray remains one of the blues' 'must hear' masters. Where did his music come from, how talented really was he, who did he himself influence... and, all these years on, what is the real legacy of Stevie Ray Vaughan?

Texas Blood

Stevie Ray Vaughan was born in 1954 in Dallas, Texas. He played guitar from an early age, but he had an advantage over many. Brother Jimmie (born 1951) is a masterful player himself, and was a big influence and inspiration. Jimmie's band got to support Jimi Hendrix in 1969, when Stevie Ray was just 15. Jimmie and Jimi even traded FX pedals at the gig.

Guitar-wise, Stevie Ray soon proved he was at least Jimmie's equal. Blues was the 'thang' in ➡ the

Photo: Robert Knight Archive / Redferns

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'Stevie is in that wonderful Texas tradition of T-Bone Walker' – John Hammond

Vaughan's Dallas domicile – BB King, Albert King, Freddie King, Buddy Guy and Albert Collins were favourites. 'Jimmie would leave his guitars around the house and tell me not to touch 'em,' Stevie Ray recalled in 1983. 'That's how I got started. I actually wanted to be a drummer, but I didn't have any drums. So I just got into what was available.'

Once he'd snaffled some of Jimmie's guitars, SRV was a seeker. 'I took music theory for one year in high school and flunked all but one six-week period,' he recalled. 'That's because I couldn't read music and the rest of the class was already eight or nine years into it. The teacher would sit down and hit a 10-fingered chord on the piano and you had to write all the notes down in about 10 seconds. I just couldn't do it. It was more like math to me.'

Stevie Ray was no scientist of guitar; blues players rarely are. Stevie Ray Vaughan was a 'feel' player, and also trusted his instincts when it came to his career.

Bringing Back 'The Real'!

When Stevie Ray formed Double Trouble with Tommy Shannon (bass) and Chris Layton (drums), acclaim came quickly on the Austin, Texas scene. The late '70s and early '80s were hardly glory years for blues guitar, and many of its original stars had been forgotten. Even the catalogue of Jimi Hendrix wasn't that popular at the time, while fellow Texans ZZ Top had started incorporating synths and sequencers to make their music more palatable to the MTV generation lapping up electronic music.

But Stevie stood firm. Guitar music in the early '80s seemed splintered, with neo-EVH shred and nascent hair metal dominating. One of SRV's main achievements was to bring back the notion of a lyrical, fluid blues guitar style but played with more fire than you'd ever heard before. He was 'real'.

Hendrix was a huge influence. In 1984, Stevie said: 'I loved Jimi a lot. He was so much more than just a blues guitarist. He could do anything. I was about 16 when he died. I could do some of his stuff by then, but lately I've been trying to find out what he was doing more than I was then. I'm really learning how to do it and I'm trying to expand on it... not that I can expand on it a whole bunch. But I try.'

Stevie Ray's early music did much to 'join the dots' between forgotten blues masters, the '60s blues of Clapton and Bloomfield, and a new youth eager for raw guitar thrills. In interviews, Stevie Ray rarely

'Passion, power, focus, fluidity, intensity'

Matt Schofield: 'Stevie may have branched, out but to me he's 100 per cent blues'

Photo: Sam Hare

Matt Schofield is one of many younger players whose guitar art was fired by Stevie Ray Vaughan. Schofield was keen to tell *Guitar & Bass* about the debt he owes to SRV...

'I was 12 when I first heard Stevie. I knew some blues, as my dad was always playing BB King, Clapton, Hendrix. I wasn't really playing guitar seriously then, but my dad, who was in America at the time, sent me a cassette of Eric Clapton's *Journeyman* album, 1989, and on the second side he'd put Stevie doing *Voodoo Child (Slight Return)*. I liked Eric's album a lot, but when I heard Stevie I thought: what the hell is this?

'I'd honestly never heard anybody play with that much focus or intensity before. I visited my dad in the US later that summer and he played me the VHS video of BB King and Albert Collins sitting in with Stevie and his band. You can see it on YouTube these days, but at that time it was a rare thing to see. That was the "holy crap!" moment.

TIMELINE
Stevie Ray Vaughan

1954-'64
Stevie Ray Vaughan born the younger brother of Jimmie, three years his senior, who also played guitar. SRV starts playing guitar aged 10, helped by Jimmie

1975
Forms a trio, Triple Threat, which morphs into Stevie Vaughan & Double Trouble. The 'Ray' was only on later billings

1982-'83
Supports Mick Jagger, plays on Bowie's *Let's Dance* and releases debut *Texas Flood*. Voted Best Electric Blues Guitarist By *Guitar Player* magazine

1986
SRV's alcohol and cocaine problems catch up with him – he collapses onstage, but vows to get clean

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chose to talk about his own style: he was generously determined to turn the spotlight on the bluesmen he'd learned from.

According to later Double Trouble producer John Hammond, the blues sage who was instrumental in bringing the recordings of Robert Johnson back into the limelight and furthering the careers of Aretha Franklin, Bob Dylan and Bruce Springsteen: 'Stevie is in that great Texas tradition of T-Bone Walker. It's a wonderful tradition. T-Bone, who I first saw back in 1936, used to do what Stevie does now... play the guitar behind his neck and everything else.'

Blues Solos And Pop Hits

Of course, Double Trouble's rise was only part of SRV's ascent. David Bowie's *Let's Dance* was when the wider world learned of this fiery Texas bluesman. Bowie had met SRV at the 1982 Montreux Jazz Festival, where Double Trouble were booed by some. Still, critics were impressed. People's James McBride wrote: 'He seemed to come out of nowhere, a Zorro-type figure in a riverboat gambler's hat, roaring into the Montreux festival with a '59 Strat at his hip and two flame-throwing sidekicks he called Double ↦

Touring *Texas Fever*: Double Trouble at the Keystone, Berkeley, CA, August 1983

Photo: Clayton Call / Redferns

'BB was a hero of mine, but he was too majestic. I didn't know where to begin, I knew I could never be BB King. But when I saw Stevie I thought: maybe I can do this.

'He was a real catalyst to make me want to play blues, and it's the same for a lot of other guys. John Mayer, Joe Bonamassa, Kenny Wayne Shepherd, myself – we're all born in 1977 and, I guess, all the right age to lock-in to Stevie Ray when we started playing seriously. Stevie died a few weeks after I'd seen that video, and I decided: I've really got to do this now.

'He had a real hero thing about him. I remember my dad saying, "See, Matt: he doesn't just play guitar, he *is* the guitar". And I've remember that all my life. He embodied passion, power, fluidity... yet still accessible.

'I remember when Stevie died. I'd just turned 13, and was playing Nintendo at our house with a nanny. My dad came back home looking sad and bleary-eyed. I asked what was wrong. He just said: "Stevie Ray just died." You had to be somewhat plugged-in to blues to understand the significance of this, but I knew kids like myself who were heartbroken. It wasn't front-page news in the UK, but I was devastated. I'd just found him and he'd showed me what I was going to do for the rest of my life. Suddenly, he was gone. But by September 1990, I'd formed a band. Even his death focussed me more.

'Stevie re-ignited people's interest in Jimi Hendrix. And his tone did a lot, in my mind, to killing-off guitar racks. An old Strat, Marshall, Dumble amps, blisteringly loud. He reawakened people. I use heavy strings. Not as heavy as his, but I don't tune down. But from an early age after learning about Stevie, I thought: that's what you do – get a Strat, big frets, heavy strings. I've still got 6100 frets on my guitars.

'Stevie is still my tonal reference point in many ways, even if I don't necessarily sound just like him. But he's the benchmark. Plenty of people say he played hard, but he wasn't really that one-dimensional. He played with a lot of grace, as well.

'I listen to Albert King more than anyone these days, probably, but I could never be like Albert. It's all about time and place. Stevie bridged a gap that linked to the past but made blues guitar accessible again. It's interesting that the word "blues" wasn't used by Stevie's record company when they initially marketed him. They used the phrase "blue collar guitar hero". Don't mention the blues! Strange, but it worked. Stevie was embraced by many more than just purist blues players. It got him in front of a classic rock crowd.

'But to me, Stevie is 100 per cent blues. He may have branched out but, to me, he's the top of the pyramid of what came before. It's hard for us who arrived later! It's like we're diluting it. I'm fine with that – everyone has to find their own spot. But Stevie took blues guitar as far as you can take it.

'There can't be another Stevie Ray Vaughan. Maybe it's time and place. But for me, he's the ultimate über-blues player.'

Matt Schofield's ninth album, Far As I Can See, is out now (Mascot/Provogue Records). www.mattschofield.com/

Matt Schofield's Essential SRV

Texas Flood (from Live At El Mocambo DVD)
'For people who don't know Stevie Ray Vaughan, watch this. Amazing. I've converted people on this track alone.'

Life Without You
'Stevie's tone is phenomenal: bright, jingly and growling all at the same time.'

Cold Shot
'Almost inventing a sub-genre of blues. Blues bands all over the world are playing that kind of shuffle. But it's Stevie and Double Trouble all coming together.'

Tin Pan Alley
'I most like the true blues side of Stevie. The way he plays those minor chords and notes. This is 100 per cent Stevie Ray. On this he was maybe influenced by Kenny Burrell and Grant Green as much as BB, Albert Collins and Albert King. On a Strat, it's incredibly moving and rolling.'

Long Way From Home
'I love the *Family Style* album. It's incredibly warm, genuine and moving. It's always real, no pretence. That's what Stevie's playing always feels like to me.'

1989
In Step, SRV's final studio album, released. It's his third twice-platinum album in the USA. *Crossfire* hits #1 on US Rock chart and wins a Grammy.

1990
SRV dies in a helicopter crash in a heavily foggy Wisconsin. He was en-route to a show in Chicago. Members of Eric Clapton's crew were also killed

1991
State of Texas declares 3rd October, his birthday, to be Stevie Ray Vaughan Day

2014
In January this year, SRV and Double Trouble were inducted into the Musicians' Hall Of Fame in Nashville

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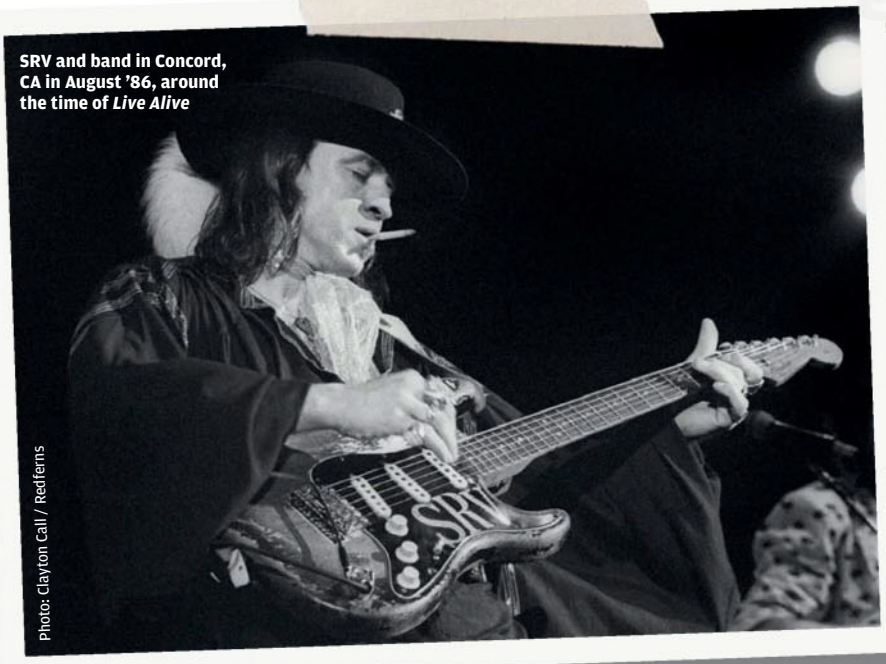

SRV and band in Concord, CA in August '86, around the time of *Live Alive*

Photo: Clayton Call / Redferns

Trouble. He had no album, no record contract, no name, but he reduced the stage to a pile of smoking cinders. Everyone wanted to know who he was.'

Bowie, ever a musical magpie, was hugely impressed. He wanted to change direction, but he needed help. *Let's Dance* producer Nile Rodgers was key in getting the two together. Stevie later recalled, 'To tell you the truth, I was not very familiar with David's music when he asked me to play on the sessions... David and I talked for hours and hours about our music, about funky Texas blues and its roots. I was amazed at how interested he was. At Montreux, he said something about being in touch and then tracked me down in California, months and months later.'

With its über-'80s Bowie/Rodgers production, *Let's Dance* was nowhere near SRV's true blues passion, but it got full-toned blues solos back in the charts, with SRV on six of the eight tracks. Maybe it was just a tactical move? Bowie asked Vaughan to join his band, and Stevie did rehearse with Bowie for the *Serious Moonlight* tour – but Stevie Ray, uneasy at playing pop in stadiums, bailed at the last minute. He explained, 'I couldn't gear everything on something I didn't really care a whole lot about. It was risky, but I didn't need all the headaches.'

Stevie Ray Vaughan turned down plenty of cash and reflected-fame, but he was exonerated. *Texas Flood* had its own impetus. Of its success in a barren blues era, Tommy Shannon said, 'We were surprised. We wanted a deal, but we also wanted to stick with what we were passionate about. *Texas Flood* captures that passion. Stevie took music very seriously and stuck to what he loved.'

Double Trouble Stir It Up

Couldn't Stand The Weather was released in May 1984 and immediately eclipsed the sales of *Texas Flood*. Stevie was now well-known – to blues aficionados as a great young player, to others as the guy with the chutzpah to turn down Bowie. *Couldn't Stand The Weather* was the big breakthrough, and with a searing cover of Hendrix's *Voodoo Child (Slight Return)* it saw increased the comparisons between Stevie and Jimi.

To many, SRV was already the new Jimi. *Texas Flood*'s title cut recalls the searing blues power of Jimi's *Red House*, while the tender ballad *Lenny* is reminiscent of such lyrical Hendrix compositions such as *Angel*, *Little Wing* or *The Wind Cries Mary*.

Stevie Ray was no Jimi facsimile, but he revived the Hendrix spirit. Indeed, SRV arguably did a ↔

The Genius Of Stevie Ray By Other Guitar Stars

How his peers and followers see him...

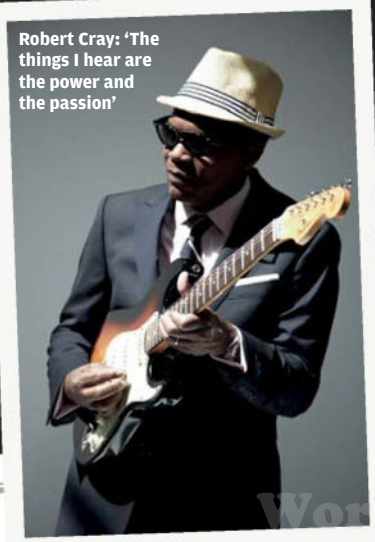
Gregg Allman: 'He was absolutely 100 percent proof, pure blues. Albert Collins, Muddy Waters – the essence of that was in everything he played. More than the Allman Brothers, he was straight-down-the-line blues.'

Jeff Beck: 'When I saw Stevie on the Guitar Shop tour in '89 or '90 he was completely cleaned up, playing better than ever. I was amazed; he could make me rediscover the blues every night... Stevie's the American apple pie blues guitarist par excellence. He's American and a southern boy. He had all the credentials to be top of the heap, and he was.'

Kenny Wayne Shepherd: 'He's responsible for bringing the blues to where it is today, and for inspiring so many other musicians to grab a guitar and start playing.'

Bernard Allison: 'What amazed me most was his attitude. Guitar players don't like to tell their secrets, but it wasn't a secret to him because he had learned it from somebody else, and then for him to pass it down to an even younger generation... I respect him so much for that.'

Robert Cray: 'He took what he learned from the blues and took it to another level. The things I hear out of Stevie are the power and the passion. I think for a long time coming there are going to be a lot of frustrated guitar players trying to pick up on Stevie's stuff.'


Robert Cray: 'The things I hear are the power and the passion'

Buddy Guy: 'Blues was locked out with a skeleton key, but Stevie was the type of person where they gave this guy the key, he opened the door, and threw the damn key away and said, "All of y'all come in here. Let's play and show people how this shit's supposed to be done." I won three WC Handy awards in Memphis [2002], and I had to dedicate them to that kid, because that kid woke blues back up.'

Lonnie Mack: 'I think that Stevie has probably influenced more young guitar players than anybody on the planet since Chuck Berry to keep rock and blues alive. I'm sure proud to say that we were friends... I think he was the greatest.'

BB King: 'He affected the way blues will be played and heard forever. I've said that playing the blues is like having to be black twice. Stevie missed on both counts, but I never noticed.'

Kenny Wayne Shepherd: 'He's responsible for bringing the blues to where it is today'

Photo: J Katz (Robert Cray) /Courtesy Photo (KWS Band) / All Rights Reserved

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Photo: Robert Knight Archive / Redferns

lot to bring Hendrix back to the daily diet of guitar fans in the 1980s. As his career grew, Vaughan's style didn't change drastically. He borrowed heavily from his '50s and '60s favourites, but what he did do was amalgamate his own heroes' licks into a heavier, funkier style that was cornerstone to the '80s blues revival. As his career blossomed, he added more jazzy inflections: in interviews, he would as much cite Django as Jimi as the roots of his own guitar style. And Stevie Ray's blues wasn't delicate or sweet: his blues was hard, sweaty, stinging, swaggering and staggering. Read any critique/appreciation of his playing, and you can pretty much guarantee the words 'fire' and 'passion' will be key descriptors.

Tommy Shannon recalled, 'We were loud on stage... playing blues in a rock'n'roll style. Stevie's guitar sounded like a monster. Stevie and our guitar tech Rene Martinez would change out everything on his guitars, from the pickups to the pots, so they wouldn't buzz. They'd wire up his amps, too. So they put a lot of effort into getting maximum volume and performance. ' In essence, Stevie Ray Vaughan raised the blues up when it was on its knees.

SRV used a lot of left-hand damping to aid his bold, rhythmic attack. The three Kings and Albert Collins didn't really do that; Hendrix did, but he was much looser player. Stevie Ray was always on the beat and totally direct. His vibrato was unique and influential. Metallica's Kirk Hammett calls it 'so damned wide and muscular', but wisely notes: 'it's almost as difficult to describe as it is to do.'

Stevie Ray's full-fat Strat tone soon became a guitar Holy Grail. He tuned-down half a step, but that's only a part of it. His guitars may have been pretty 'regular' Strats compared to the locking-whammy turbocharged 'superstrats' of the mid-'80s, but Vaughan was a tonehound (see box, left). He had his own foibles – Marshalls for clean sound, Fenders for overdrive, anyone? – but he brought back the purity of valve tone in an age when many other guitarists were fizzin' and poppin' into transistor-driven amps and digital racks. His use of heavy strings, .013-.058, was another key part of his sound and influential on others.

Then, there's the pure physicality of SRV's playing. BB King may have been one of SRV's heroes, but Vaughan didn't play like that. Kirk Hammett, a late convert to SRV's playing, enthuses 'He was a super-aggressive player, and he didn't really pick from his wrist – he picked with his entire arm.'

SRV: The Legacy

Stevie Ray Vaughan's key legacy is, of course, his own music. All his studio albums – *Texas Flood, Couldn't Stand The Weather, Soul To Soul, In Step* and *Family Style* (his duet album with brother Jimmie) have all been subsequently re-released with bonus tracks of alternative takes and rarities from each of the sessions.

If you like hard electric blues, you can't go wrong with any of these.

The Sky Is Crying is the ultimate 'outtakes' album: like many posthumous Hendrix releases, it opens a window on works in progress, and is no cynical cash-in: its release was overseen by Jimmie, who wanted to share Stevie Ray's music as much as he could. *In The Beginning* (1980) and *Live At El* ➔

SRV's Gear

Mongrel Fenders, fat frets and titanic tone

Stevie played Fender Stratocasters for most of his career. Although he referred to his battered sunburst 'Number 1' as 'a '59', it was in fact a mongrel of a '62 neck and a '63 body with '59 pickups.

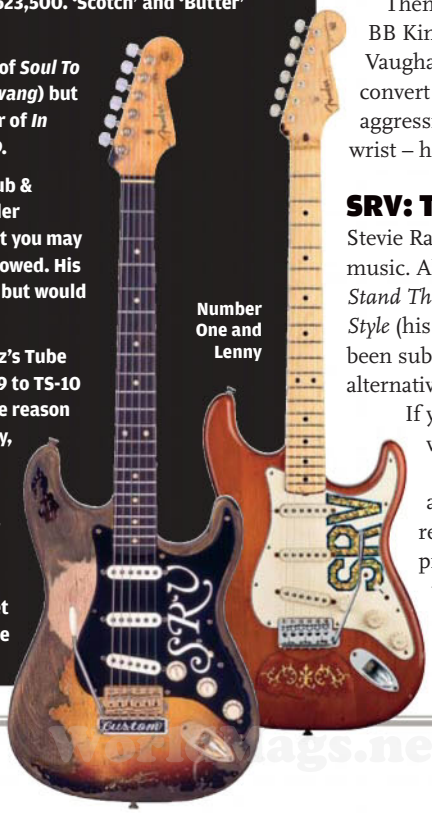
The brown-stained 'Lenny' Strat was a '63 or '64 he found in a pawnshop in the early '80s. He didn't have the money to buy it, so his wife Lenny (Lenora) and friends raised the cash and it was used to record *Lenny* and *Riviera Paradise*. 'Lenny' sold at the Eric Clapton Crossroads Guitar auction in June 2004 for $623,500. 'Scotch' and 'Butter' were other Strat favourites.

SRV had a 1958 Gibson ES-335 dot-neck (see the cover of *Soul To Soul*) and a Gibson Johnny Smith (played on *Stang's Swang*) but he didn't play Gibsons often. The National on the cover of *In Step*, a gift from roadie Byron Barr, was a 1928 or 1929.

In the early '80s Stevie used a Marshall 4140 2x12" Club & Country 100W combo for clean tones and his two Fender Vibroverbs for distortion – somewhat opposite to what you may expect. More Marshalls and Fender Super Reverbs followed. His amp volume settings on stage usually started at 7-7.5, but would end up at 10 for *Voodoo Child (Slight Return)*.

In terms of legacy, SRV did much too popularise Ibanez's Tube Screamer OD pedals. He upgraded from TS-808 to TS-9 to TS-10 Classic as they were launched, but his patronage is one reason why vintage Tube Screamers command so much money, even now. His wah pedals were '60s Vox models.

Despite loving Strat tone, SRV didn't like Fender frets. He often got his Strats modded with heavier Gibson or Dunlop fretwire. Part of his thick tone was also down to very heavy strings, typically .013, .015, .019 (plain), .028, .038 and .058, though he did play with an .011 set when his fingers were sore. He famously put super glue on his fretting fingertips to make them harder.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With faithful Number One, Saratoga, New York, June 1989

started I had .09s, and I worked my way up to .10s, then .11s, .12s and then .13s. My low string is a .56.' Garza's strongarm syncopated rhythm is straight out of the SRV book of bold blues.

Doyle Bramhall II was a collaborator with Stevie Ray and Jimmie Vaughan, with co-writing credits: they were childhood friends in Texas. Bramhall played with Jimmie's Fabulous Thunderbirds, and is now in Eric Clapton's band. Bramhall is his own man: like Albert King he plays left-hand 'upside-down' without any re-stringing.

He refutes any conscious aping of SRV, and the two don't sound the same, but a big influence is there. When once asked 'what typifies a Texas guitar player?' Bramhall replied, 'Big strings and high action through a Super Reverb amp.' Stevie Ray would approve.

The UK's current premier blues guitarist Matt Schofield is a Stevie Ray acolyte. Again, Schofield has his own sound – if anyone, he's more often compared to Robben Ford – but seeing a ghan video at 12 persuaded Schofi he, too, could play the blues.

Listen up

STEVIE RAY VAUGHAN
Couldn't Stand The Weather (1984)
The unmissable second album with *Scuttle Buttin'*, *Cold Shot*, *Voodoo Chile* and more. Pure quality

STEVIE RAY VAUGHAN
In Step (1989)
The final release with Double Trouble; slicker than before but still masterful throughout

STEVIE RAY VAUGHAN
Soul To Soul (1985)
Rarely cited as his best-recorded album but still worthy of your attention

VAUGHAN BROTHERS
Family Style (1990)
With brother Jimmie, a brilliant and minimal player in his own right

STEVIE RAY VAUGHAN
Texas Flood (1983)
The hair-raising debut, mixing blazing blues with stunning feel

Mocambo (1982) are raw live albums released after his death: compare with 1985's Live Alive, when he was a star. If you just need a place to start, *The Essential Stevie Ray Vaughan* is two killer CDs.

But Stevie Ray's music was hugely influential on others. In the '90s, the fire of both Jonny Lang and Kenny Wayne Shepherd was ignited by SRV. Lang has gone on to a poppier sound, but Shepherd is hugely indebted to Stevie Ray – he plays with similar percussive attack and phrasing. KWS's battered Strat tells its own story of SRV's influence. Shepherd got to meet SRV when he seven, and took up guitar in earnest soon after. Although no straight copy, Shepherd flies the flag for SRV-style blues. Double Trouble drummer Chris Layton is now in his band – on 2014's *Goin' Home*, KWS covers Stevie Ray's *The House Is Rockin'*, encouraged by Layton. Shepherd explained, 'It couldn't have come from a greater source than a member of that band telling me to do that song. If they have a problem with it, everybody can kiss my ass!

'I wanted to go for something that wasn't obvious. When people think SRV, they think *Pride And Joy*, *Texas Flood* and a few others, but I wanted to do *The House Is Rockin'*. We needed another uptempo song, so it fit. Chris loves it, I love it.'

The 'Texican rock'n'roll' of Los Lonely Boy's Stratman Henry Garza also owes a debt to SRV. Los Lonely Boys don't much sound similar to Double Trouble, but Garza notes, 'I read an interview with Stevie Ray where he said anybody who played light-gauge strings was a pussy. I was 13 or 14, and it stuck in my head. When I

Stevie Ray In The Blues Pantheon

It's not easy to reinvent the blues, as it's hardly an artform that lends itself to radical change. Stevie Ray was no radical himself: as Tommy Shannon later reflected, 'the music was guiding us, instead of us guiding the music.' And while latter-day Stevie Ray cuts grooved with a more funky jazz/pop sensibility – listen to *Crossfire* – he stayed faithful to the feel that meant so much to him as a child.

Clapton and Hendrix, turbocharged the blues in the '60s, and Stevie Ray Vaughan did it in the '80s. Since then, there's not been anyone quite his equal. In an age of sterile synthpop, hair metal and an MTV video being as important as the song, Stevie Ray Vaughan delivered masterful musicianship that turned a generation back to the fearsome tone and power of electric blues guitar.

'I don't think anyone has commanded my respect more, to this day' – Eric Clapton

Stevie Ray Vaughan's death in a helicopter crash, after a 1990 show with Eric Clapton, robbed guitar of a raw, mercurial talent. Clapton's later reflection shows how much meant, and continues to mean, to the art of the blues. 'I don't think anyone has commanded my respect more, to this day,' said Clapton. 'The first time I heard Stevie Ray [it was on the radio, as EC was driving], I thought, "Whoever this is, he is going to shake the world." That doesn't happen to me very often. It's going to be a long time before anyone that brilliant will come along again.

'I didn't get to see or hear Stevie play near often enough, but every time I did, I got chills... I knew I was in the presence of greatness.'

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Solo Flight

The future of the guitar instrumental is in good hands with Johnny A, who melds his love of pop with a uniquely jazzy, bluesy approach. Interview by **Michael Heatley**

The current economic climate has seen a boom in the self-employed – but Johnny A took the decision to go it alone all of 15 years ago. At the same time, he decided to specialise in instrumental music, prompted by a bronchial infection that laid him low. The guitar would be his voice, and the former hired gun for Doug Clifford (Creedence Clearwater Revival), Bobby Whitlock (Derek and the Dominos) and others would be singing for his own supper from now on.

Fast forward a decade and a half from 1999, when first album *Sometime Tuesday Morning* appeared, and he's busily promoting *Driven*. Like his debut, it's a self-released project... but it's been made the hard way.

'I engineered the whole album completely, mixed it completely, played everything and wrote the songs,' he confirms. 'There were some fragments of songs that had been around for a while but weren't finished. All the other songs were conceived and massaged within the studio process without looking at a clock and without worrying about a chequebook.

'It didn't start out being a total solo project,' Johnny continues. 'I did pre-production with drummers, guitarists and bass players, but I wasn't really getting what I wanted out of the songs. That's when I decided to do it myself – I could hear in my head how I wanted to shape this record. But it was important to me that the record didn't sound like one guy doing everything.'

The result is difficult to categorise, but that's not so much deliberate as a reflection of his upbringing. 'I grew up at a time where there was a lot of variety on the radio. I listened to a lot of music back in the day and radio was a diverse format, unlike now. As I grew up, my earliest musical memories in the late '50s were people like the Everly Brothers, Buddy Holly, Ricky Nelson and all that stuff. Then, obviously, the Beatles – I'm an extreme Beatles fanatic. I went on to get into the other British Invasion acts like the Yardbirds, Animals, Kinks and Hollies. Then I eventually got into the British blues guys like Clapton, Peter Green and Hendrix – even though Jimi was an American by way of the UK!

'I started getting into progressive music after that: Gentle Giant, Genesis and Yes – then started to get into fusion and was influenced by people like Bill Connors [Chick Corea], John McLaughlin's original Mahavishnu Orchestra. Then the hard jazz giants like Pat Martino, Wes Montgomery and Johnny Smith, and finally my love affair with the music of Chet Atkins and Les Paul. I really, really love ➔

> *'It was important to me that the record didn't sound like one guy doing everything'*

Gear

Guitars
Gibsons: Johnny A signature, Firebird VI, ES-295, Les Paul, Advanced Jumbo and J-165 acoustics

Amps
None; PC used live

Effects
Live: TC Electronic G-System, three BK Butler Tube Drivers

'It doesn't matter what the genre is, as long as it's a great song and arrangement'

melody and arrangement, so it doesn't matter what the musical genre is as long as it's a great song and a great arrangement. That's what appeals to me.'

The new album is his third studio production, to which can be added a 2006 instructional DVD entitled *Taste, Tone, Space,* and a live DVD/CD, *One November Night*, recorded in his native Boston and released four years later. The same year, the Boston Music Awards declared him Blues Artist of 2010.

Recognition like that vindicated 'going instrumental'. 'I realised that whoever delivered the melody is really the sound of the band, whether it's Chris Botti on the trumpet, Mick Jagger on vocals or Jeff Beck on guitar. You can replace everything except the delivery of the melody and the songwriter.'

But the decision involved an element of risk; his previous employment, as lead guitarist in former J Geils Band frontman Peter Wolf's band, had meant a regular paycheck. 'I needed to survive financially; I am a family man, I have two kids, a house, all that stuff.' He took the leap nonetheless, and *Sometime Tuesday Morning* was the result.

'I have a strong attachment to the release because it was my first solo album and was a drastic change to how I approached my music and my guitar playing. In the past I had always either fronted a band, was the singer in the band or I was a hired gun, a guitar player behind a vocalist. It helped things having a bronchial infection and then Peter disbanding his band in 1998-'99. It's what pushed me to the instrumental thing. I didn't really want my career and survival in the hands of someone else.'

Second album *Get Inside* (2004) was more aggressive than *Sometime Tuesday Morning,* and the live *One November Night* is, in turn, rawer than the first two releases. The difference with the current album, Johnny explains, 'is that the other releases have a lot of swing and shuffle – there's not a lot of backbeat groove – whereas *Driven* is really totally a backbeat album. There's no swing from the standpoint of swing eights, shuffles or anything like that. It grooved, but there's no shuffles on it; that was a conscious thing.' Johnny started life as a drummer age six, so perhaps he has an advantage over most of us.

Making this album isn't all Johnny's been up to since his last release. 'I built my own studio with a SSL console and all kinds of esoteric tube gear. I wanted to approach this album like the Beatles – not that I'm comparing myself – approached *Revolver*. From what I've read, it was the first time they really used the studio as a tool as opposed to going in, getting a take and moving on. They used the studio as a canvas, and that's what I do with *Driven*.'

There's another difference, too. While *Sometime Tuesday Morning* unexpectedly sold 100,000 copies, thanks to jazz-shuffle radio hit *Oh Yeah, Get Inside,* recorded for Steve Vai's Favored Nations label, ➔

Photo: Michael Sparks Keegan/All Rights Reserved

Johnny A's Gibson

When Gibson proposed a Johnny A signature guitar, our man was understandably flattered. 'I was never arrogant enough to think anyone would name a guitar after me – especially Gibson, who I consider to be the Mercedes Benz of guitars. I'd been endorsed by them for seven years previously and was totally stoked.' It's turned out to be their second best-selling signature model, possibly because it has never been out of production since 2002.

Johnny had recorded 70 per cent of *Sometime Tuesday Morning* with a Gibson ES-295 with vibrato and flatwound strings, but suffered feedback problems live. 'I started using my 335 and a Les Paul, both with Bigsbys. They made me a '59 Les Paul with Bigsby – they weren't making them for anyone else at the time. Eventually I got three and used only Les Pauls live.'

When Gibson heard Johnny was missing the hollow tone of the jazz guitar, they invited him to come up with ideas for an instrument that gave him the sound he needed without the hassle. 'So that's where the idea of a thinline, completely hollow-bodied guitar came in – but with a 25.5" scale so I could keep the snappiness of the ES-295. Even though the 295 has a 24.75" scale, it's got P90s; it has a percussive attack to it which I was missing, We added a longer-scale neck to the thinline body and also added ebony to the neck to give it some more spank.

'We started talking in summer 2002, I used the prototypes on *Get Inside* and it came out at NAMM 2003. So it was a year from scratching it on a piece of paper to it coming to market – an amazingly quick turnaround.

'I still love it and play it every day – it does everything I need it to do.'

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Listen up

JOHNNY A
Sometime Tuesday Morning
(1999)
Released 15 years ago on JA's Aglaophone Records label and reissued by Favored Nations two years later, this covers-heavy debut album introduced a unique style to the world

JOHNNY A
One November Night
(2010)
A stunning live DVD/CD set that's a good place for a first encounter. Highlights include Hendrix/Cream/Zep tribute *Jimi Jam* and the '60s soul classic *Walk Away Renée*

JOHNNY A
Driven
(2014)
The latest self-released effort mixes 10 jazz, country and Motown-flavoured originals with a bittersweet cover of the Bee Gees' *To Love Somebody*. Reveals more with each listen, so worth sticking with

And another thing...

Johnny's surname is Antonopoulos, but he dropped it at age eight because it was always being mispronounced

'only' sold about 45,000. 'That was spawned out of four years being on the road, so I came back to the studio without a break. Plus I was under extreme time and financial pressure.' It's clear the experience, allied with not being able to use the same mix engineer with whom he'd struck up a rapport on his debut, had a lot to do with Johnny building his own studio and taking time learning how to use it.

He's no longer on Favored Nations – 'It was strictly a business thing' – but remains friends with Steve Vai. 'We do exchange emails occasionally and we see each other if we're in the same town. He was the guy who gave me a leg up from being a guy known regionally and with other artists I'd worked with locally. He gave me national and international exposure, so I do owe a lot to him.'

Johnny doesn't use conventional amplification, either live or in the studio; everything is computer-based, and effects in the studio are added afterwards. 'I record the guitar 100 per cent dry, and the ambience, the delay and everything else is built in during the mix process. Live, I use a TC Electronic G-System for all my time-based effects, and BK Butler Tube Drivers – I have three of them in the loops of my PC – that I use for different levels of gain.'

He has put a new band together and, having played the last 15 years in a trio, has finally expanded the ranks with a support guitarist. 'I feel the music requires it,' he explains. 'On this record I was trying to deliver more as a vocalist – maybe Paul Rodgers, Paul McCartney – somebody singing, rather than a chord-cluster thing like on [first album track] *Wichita Lineman*. As much as I want to deliver the music that way live, I couldn't do things simultaneously. I might go back to a trio or, if finance allows, I'd add a percussionist and a multi-talented guy to trigger loops and add keyboards when needed. But it's expensive...'

Future ambitions include making a Christmas record. 'Also, I'd like to do an album celebrating the artists that influenced me when I was growing up,' Johnny says. 'Paying tribute to those people... because without those people I wouldn't be the artist that I am, for whatever that's worth.'

Putting the A in Britain

Johnny has visited Britain twice – the first when *Get Inside* was released and he played a showcase at London's Borderline, and more recently in 2007 when he opened for Joe Satriani. 'It was a fantastic experience. Joe was fabulous; he had a great audience and we were playing to sold-out rooms of maybe 2500-3000 people a night.

'I met many fans at the merchandise stall, made a lot of friends and even now, seven years later, I still get a lot of emails from the people that were in those audiences wanting me to come back – and I would love to. It was a great experience, but it is expensive. I don't know how to do it. I wanted to do a club tour after the Satriani thing, but there wasn't enough money [on offer], I'd have been under the ground financially. I'm past the point in my life when I can eat Ritz crackers and sleep on people's floors!'

But it's clearly going to take some time to get over the experience of producing the current album. 'I didn't put it down for weeks at a time. It was a 14-16 hour work experience every day for 18 months. I took myself off the road for the most part and just did that. I know I've never worked as hard at anything as I did on this record. So it's difficult for me now to look ahead. The band has only done a handful of gigs, so I'm still getting my stage legs with a new sound and the flow of a completely new show.'

Any guitarist playing instrumental rock will inevitably be compared with Jeff Beck, and Johnny recently shared a stage with the master at a Stateside rock'n'roll fantasy camp: 'a real bucket-list moment. I was one of the "counsellors", he was a marquee name. I'd met Jeff before because I'd opened for him in 2000-2001 and he was at the Crossroads festival I played in 2004. We've crossed paths several times and have a couple of mutual friends, but at the camp I was able to play on a stage with him for half an hour. He's one of my favourite players. I won't forget that in a hurry!'

And you shouldn't forget the name Johnny A, for this fella has been under the radar far too long. Check him out at www.johnnya.com and keep this self-employed six-stringer in business.

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A New Shade OF BLUE

Turning down a pop career for the blues life, Gloucestershire's Laurence Jones is now recording in Louisiana and making waves as a guitar player to watch. Interview by **Matt Lamy**

'What did I listen to growing up? Well, my dad had a Walter Trout CD which he got when he went to see him live in 1992... in fact, that's the year I was born!' Laurence Jones laughs. When talking about his career, Laurence's conversation that never veers too far away from betraying a 'pinch me I must be dreaming' outlook. No wonder: think of the archetypal blues guitarist and a 22-year-old from Chipping Camden, who lives with his folks won't be top of the list. But listen to him play, and it's clear that his success is not due to good fortune. As legends such as Walter Trout, Johnny Winter and Otis Grand have all agreed, strap a guitar around Laurence and the future of their music is good hands. The obvious question is: how did a young Brit become the blues's next great hope?

'I've always had a passion for music,' Laurence says. 'I started playing classical guitar when I was eight. I did all my grades but I felt that I wanted to do something that didn't have so much structure.

'I used to enter all kinds of classical competitions, and one day I was practising with a keyboard player. He played an E7 – the blues chord – and I said, "Wow, what was that?" He said, "That's a blues chord that I've been working on." I was blown away, it was amazing. I'd never heard anything like that before and I knew right then what I wanted to do.'

The road to guitar heroics isn't always straight, and before learning his trade in pubs and clubs Laurence's earliest performances were in less gritty venues. 'I started off in the Chipping Camden School's swing band,' he says. 'We did Disneyland Paris and all kinds of posh manor house events. I went on to form a covers band playing pubs and functions. Then, when I was 15, I formed my own

Gear

Guitars
Fender Custom Shop 2001 '62 reissue, 1970s Gibson Les Paul goldtop, Lindsay Wilson custom with Jesse Davey pickups, Delaney custom with two humbuckers

Backline
Dr. Z EZG head and a 4x10" cab, Fender Hot Rod Deluxe, Fender Twin Reverb

Effects
Analog Man King Of Tone overdrive, Mad Professor Deep Blue delay, Mojo Hand FX Rook overdrive, Dunlop Cry Baby wah

Living with Crohn's

Despite his positive outlook, Laurence does have one significant problem – he suffers from Crohn's disease. 'I only got it when I was 18 and it was a big shock... it's a life-changing kind of condition. I'm constantly in pain with it, and it's hard when you're on the road because you don't know what your next meal is going to be. So I try to stick to eating stuff I know – if I eat something bad, I make sure I don't eat it again.

'My guitar definitely helps take my mind off of it. It's a disease that can get a lot of people quite down, and you can let it take over your life. I try to keep busy, try to eat healthily, and try to keep fit so I don't feel tired because Crohn's disease can drain you. Being on the road is a buzz and it's good for me, but it's also its own worst enemy especially if I get too tired, which is what seems to trigger my problems.

'There's only ever been one time when I couldn't carry on to do an encore... that was when we were playing in Switzerland. Now I'm taking a new kind of medication and it's going well. But I've tried all kinds of things – I say Crohn's disease is maybe why I've got the blues!'

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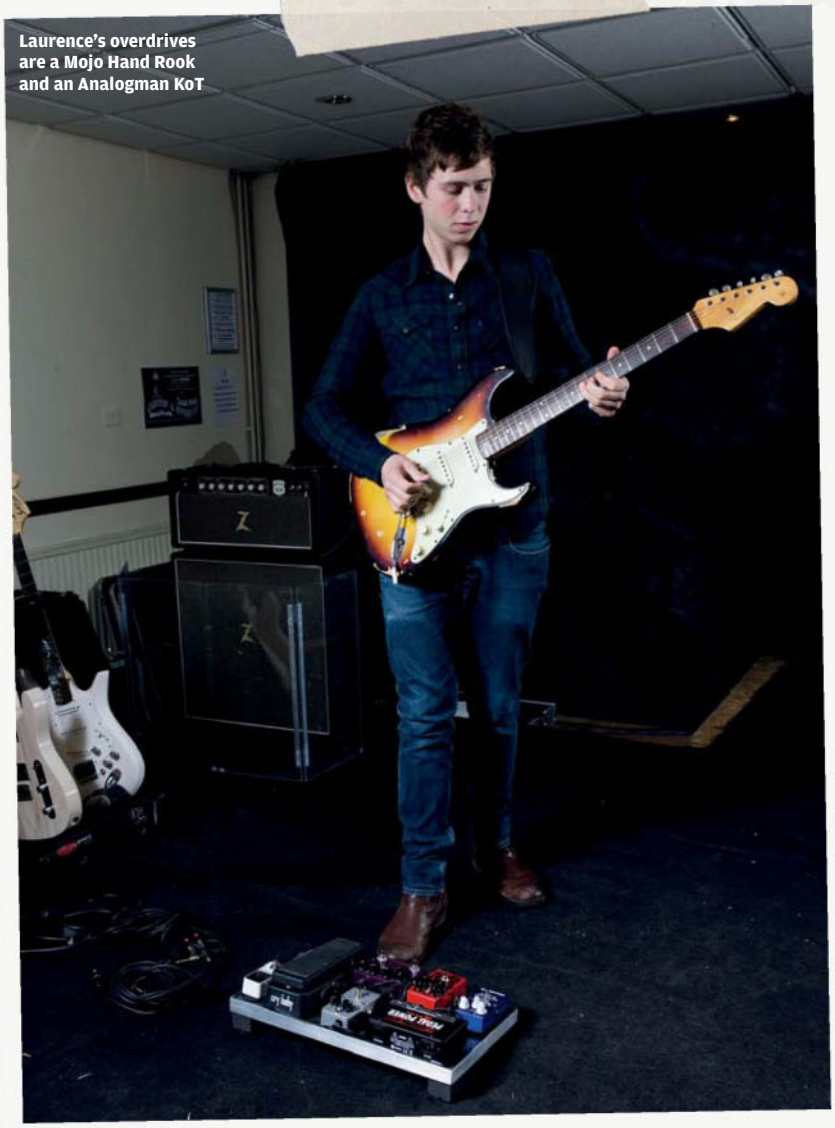

Laurence's overdrives are a Mojo Hand Rook and an Analogman KoT

Photo: Mike Prior

blues rock band and decided to stick to that and see how far I could get. I've been on the road ever since.

'I gigged quite a lot on the pub circuit when I was 16 – we had lots of people asking if we were even old enough to be in there, so we had to lie! I played that scene for about two years, and managed to get a support slot on a UK tour with Wishbone Ash. I got good reviews from that, and that was how I broke into the blues scene. I did go to university – I went to the Academy of Music & Sound in Birmingham. I couldn't carry on for my full degree because just as I got to the end of my foundation degree I got my first record deal and I was offered tours with Walter Trout and Jonny Winter. I thought, yeah... I'll take this.

No pedals, please

Laurence says playing with blues legends has helped him develop as a player. But in one area – pedalboards – it's also made him regress slightly.

'I got to jam with Otis Grand at the Shepherd's Bush Empire for the Walter Trout tribute concert. We were stood backstage watching and all of a sudden he just pointed and said: "You boy, get on stage." So I walked on stage and he whispered in my ear: "If you use a pedalboard I'm going to kill you!"' Laurence laughs.

'Otis had a chat with me and even Walter said, all these great blues people – Johnny Winter, Clapton, Walter, Otis Grant – they just plug in. If those guys can do it, then that's what I want to do. A lot of tone is in your fingers, although good gear helps. So my pedal is very simple: just two overdrives, a delay, a tuner and a wah.'

'I pull shapes and faces when I play. I really can't help it, I'm just enjoying myself'

'Mum and dad have always been behind me. My dad drives the van and sells the merch. When I was playing in pubs, he'd be there looking after us when it got rowdy. He's not really a guitar player, although he used to strum a few chords. In fact, that's what got me wanting to play – I wanted to be better than him!'

Also offering support were those headline acts that Laurence found himself on tour with. 'I've got on really well with guys like Johnny Winter and Walter Trout. They are the blues and they want to see the future of the blues in good hands. I'm very close to Walter, but ohnny Winter was also really great. He invited me into his tour van, we had some drinks with him and we got to chat about the music. He was so inspiring. He showed me his guitars – the Firebird and a custom-built model that he takes on the road.

'My first-ever gig at Shepherd's Bush Empire was supporting Johnny Winter. The atmosphere was great, you could sense that Bowie, the Stones and Status Quo had all been there. Backstage there were pictures and autographs from everyone who had performed there, and it just made we want to play better. I wasn't nervous, I'd learnt my trade, I'd done the graft before I got there, but I was really feeding off the adrenalin.

'I find it's easier to play to a bigger audience than it is to play to a smaller audience. It's easier to feed off them and react to the atmosphere. And you've got to put on a good show if you're supporting the likes of ohnny Winter – you've got to be on form. I pull shapes and faces when I play. I can't really help it, I just enjoy myself, it all just happens. I guess it's the feeling I get. I can't compare it to anything else – when I'm playing the guitar in front of people, it's just a unique feeling.'

Like many students, Laurence dabbled with things he probably shouldn't have while at university. ➔

Main guitars: a Lindsey Wilson, a Delaney and a Fender CS '62 Strat

Photo: Mike Prior

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Listen up

LAURENCE JONES
Thunder In The Sky
(2011)
Laurence's debut album showed his intentions with some incredible guitar work, not least an amazing cover of BB King's *The Thrill Is Gone*

LAURENCE JONES
Temptation
(2014)
Taking everything to a new level with clear direction from producer Mike Zito, *Temptation* has Laurence singing, playing and writing like a bona fide star

Photo: Mike Prior

'I did some pop demos, and I was actually offered a pop record deal with Proper Records. But I felt in my heart that I wanted to be a blues guitarist, to be a bit different. I sort of felt, if I wasn't going to do it, then who else would?

'But there's another reason why I like the blues: it's not precise. It doesn't matter if there are a few mistakes – that's the beauty of it. Pop is so precise and everything is in its place. I want a rawness to my music, that kind of Jimi Hendrix kind of feel.'

The next step in Laurence's career came in 2012. 'I sent my first album to Ruf Records when I was 18, but it wasn't what they were after at the time. But in 2012 I supported the Royal Southern Brotherhood, and after seeing me do that Thomas Ruf signed me up. At the end of last year he flew me out to Louisiana and I recorded my newest album, *Temptation*, in Dockside Studio. There were Grammy plaques from BB King and Derek Trucks up on the wall. It was like another world, it was amazing... I'd never been to America before.

'I was lucky enough to have Mike Zito from the Royal Southern Brotherhood produce the album, Charlie Wooton from the Royal Southern Brotherhood on bass, and I also had Derek Trucks' drummer Yonrico Scott. It was an amazing week of recording.

'When I was in America it was hard for me to bring all my guitars on the plane, so Mike supplied lots of kit. I)elaney guitars in the studio and I'm actually endorsed by them now. It's brilliant! I've got a custom Telecaster-style with two humbuckers. It's nice and simple, just plug in and go. The Telecaster is such a versatile guitar, but you don't see many Teles with humbuckers, and it's not as heavy as a Les Paul. That's what appealed to me.

'I also brought something special back from the States – a '70s Les Paul goldtop which belonged to Luther)n. Mike Zito had it and I said, I love this guitar. Mike said to take it ck with me and use it on tour. I used that on my album and it's the mo amazing Les Paul I've ever heard. It weighs a ton, but I think that's what adds to the sound.

'My number one guitar is a Fender Custom Shop 2001 '62 reissue. It's a nice beat-up kind of sunburst guitar. All ny heroes – people like Walter and Eric Clapton – played Strats, and just the sound for me. I've tried all kinds of guitars, but a Strat just feels really natural.

'And I've also got a Lindsay Wilson c stom-made guitar on loan which has pickups made by Jesse Davey from the Hoax. It's beautifully made, w h a handcrafted inlay on the neck. It has a very clever feature where you can press a switch to combine the front and back pickups, using the two single coils together to give it a bit more beef. It has such a natural sound to it. You know it's a good guitar before you even plug it in.'

Although happy with his newest album, Laurence isn't resting on his laurels. 'I'm already working on songs for my next album, but there comes a time in your career when you've got to stand on your own two feet. So we've just been doing my own UK tour and we're going to be putting together my own headline tours for Europe next year. That's something to really look forward to.

> *'The blues isn't precise... a few mistakes don't matter. That's the beauty of it'*

'Life on the road is part of the inspiration for my songs – there's a lot to see out there and I've been grateful to see a lot of it. I've learnt a lot of things from my mentors, people like Walter Trout. But I never take any of this for granted. I really appreciate it all and I'm well aware of where I've come from in my career. I set out to get on Ruf Records and make a name for myself in the blues scene, and that's where I've ended up... and I'm really grateful for that.'

It's a long road from Chipping Camden to Louisiana, but if talent – and enthusiasm – are the very best ingredients for success, then Laurence Jones' journey is only just beginning.

And another thing...

It's not just about the blues. 'I like a bit of progressive music, too,' Laurence says. 'Bands like the Cure and the Groundhogs and Pink Floyd.'

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GIBSON
2014 Les Paul Classic & 2014 Les Paul Futura

With different colours, pickups and electronics, this year's Les Paul menu has some good surprises in store. Review by **Richard Purvis**

As a great amphibian once sang: 'It's not easy being green/Having to spend each day the colour of the leaves/When I think it might be nicer being red, or yellow, or gold...' These two Les Pauls must know exactly how Kermit felt – assuming he meant wine red, TV yellow or goldtop. Gibson has opened up its colour palette for the 2014 range, whether the traditionalists like it or not, and that means a new starring role for previously obscure shades of blue, purple... and green.

This year's nitro finishes are claimed to be more shiny and more scratch-resistant than before, but it's not just about fruity paint jobs; there are other changes that you may consider much more significant if you like playing guitars, not just leering at them. Gibson has been tinkering with everything from the electrics to the fretboard binding – so prepare to be delighted, disturbed, or maybe a bit of both.

Mahogany body has been slightly weight-relieved

Slim taper neck profile and keystone tuners

The 2014 Classic now has coil-tappable alnico pickups, a master tone knob and a switch that engages a boost circuit

2014 Les Paul Classic

From 1990 until it went out of production just a few years back, the Classic was a handy lower-priced option for Les Paul Standard fans who wanted something with a slightly skinnier neck and didn't mind uncovered ceramic pickups. The new version still has the 'slim taper' neck profile and the pickups are still uncovered, but now they're alnico '57 Classics in a black/cream 'zebra' arrangement that goes nicely with our test guitar's semi-translucent maple top. The colour is called seafoam green. You may find it lurid and distasteful; personally, having missed the late-'60s sunburst revival due to not being born yet, I think this is the most beautiful Les Paul I've ever seen.

So what else should we be looking out for? The 'Classic' truss-rod cover is back, the strap buttons have grown a bit and the gold 'speed knobs' are now indented for better grip. And it's these controls that give us our first clue to what's new beneath the surface: both volumes are push-pull and one of the tone controls has done a runner, its place taken by a toggle switch. The push-pull business allows you to run each humbucker in single-coil mode, while the toggle engages a boost circuit – not an entirely new idea for Gibson, as last year's Les Paul Traditional Pro II had one. For this there's a PP3 battery squeezed into the rear control cavity, and on the circuit board next to it you'll find a trimpot for adjusting the boost level from virtually zero to 15dB. The cavity's plastic cover has a flip-up hatch for changing the battery, but it's so hard to get into that you may require the services of a safe-cracker.

FACTFILE
2014 LES PAUL CLASSIC

DESCRIPTION
Solidbody electric guitar. Made in USA
PRICE **£1499 inc. hard case**

BUILD **Mahogany body with maple top, set mahogany neck, 22-fret rosewood fingerboard, Tun-O-Matic bridge and stopbar tailpiece**
ELECTRICS **Two uncovered '57 Classics, three-way switch, individual volume controls with push-pull coil-tap, master tone control, boost switch**
LEFT-HANDERS **Yes**
FINISH **Seafoam green, wine red, lemon burst, vintage sunburst, ebony, heritage cherry sunburst**

SCALE LENGTH
630mm/24.75"
NECK WIDTH
Nut 43mm
12th fret 53mm
DEPTH OF NECK
First fret 20mm
Ninth fret 22.5mm
STRING SPACING
Nut 37mm
Bridge 51mm
ACTION AS SUPPLIED
12th fret treble 1.25mm
12th fret bass 2mm
WEIGHT **4.3kg/9.5lbs**

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The Standard comes with Min-ETune, or pay a bit more for the Standard Plus, which doesn't
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Tokai
ULS100QMATT
Single-cut solidbody with mahogany/maple build and zebra pickup bobbins
RRP **£1075**

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Both pickups are '57 Classic Zebra Coils with alnico II magnets

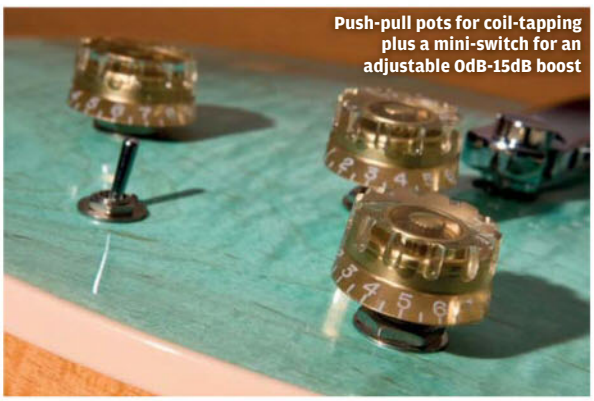
The coil-taps add a lighter tone with lots more zing and the boost gives just the push you need for sweaty solos

The two-piece mahogany body has 'traditional' weight relief chambering, which means nothing too drastic, and the overall finish is good – though the binding has one or two not-quite-perfect spots. And while we're on that subject, here's something that some long-time Gibsonites will not like one bit: for all new models except the LP Traditional, the fingerboard binding no longer goes over the fret ends. This brings a slightly wider playing surface, as the fretwire can run all the way to the edges; the downside is that any sharp corners are exposed in all their hand-scraping glory – and judging by our review sample, you could be in for a snaggy ride.

Sounds

Not everything is new: as you have every right to expect from the name, the classic Les Paul sound is here in force. Lightly overdriven it's fat and creamy, with a nice thuddy impact on the wound strings and plenty of cut from that maple top (aided perhaps by the absence of pickup covers). Plug straight into something tweedy and you'll have a fine time on all three pickup settings. The clean tones might be a little lacking in cheeky mids for some people – that is, people who don't really like Les Pauls – but there's no shortage of sparkle on the high E and B strings.

If non-cheeky mids just aren't acceptable, and your Telecaster is away visiting a sick relative this week, you need to know about the coil-tap option. Equally effective on both pickups, this results in a lighter tone with lots more Fender-style zing and even a hint of cluck, and it's a more than worthy addition to the arsenal. What's more, moving into single-coil operation does not bring a significant drop in output – a problem we've encountered more than once – so gigging guitarists need have no qualms about switching back and forth in mid-song. Unsurprisingly, one coil means much more background noise if you're close to your amp, but the centre setting is hum-cancelling.



Push-pull pots for coil-tapping plus a mini-switch for an adjustable 0dB-15dB boost

FINAL SCORE	
2014 LES PAUL CLASSIC	
Build Quality	**18**/20
Playability	**18**/20
Sound	**18**/20
Value for money	**18**/20
Vibe	**20**/20
TOTAL	**92%**

Now, an onboard booster might make you think of brutally hot active pickups that obliterate a guitar's natural character – but bin those thoughts right now. Quite simply it sounds the same as the unboosted tone but louder, just like engaging a good clean boost pedal. With an amp set marginally shy of the tipping point into full-blown overdrive, it's just the push you need for sweaty solos; with an amp that's already over the tipping point, and the internal trimpot turned up to full, it's insanity.

2014 Les Paul Futura

There are now over seven billion people in the world, so surely at least one of them must think Inverness green is a nice colour for a guitar. Is that a bit harsh? To be fair, this blue-ish hue is not so dissimilar to the gorgeous seafoam green of the Classic, so maybe it's all to do with context: the Futura is completely green, with no binding and no scratchplate, and no gold or beige bits to provide contrasting warmth. It's a solid and almost metallic finish, reflecting the modernistic model name, and you know even before checking the price that this is a stripped-down rock machine in the Special/Junior tradition. The other colours available include equally 'futuristic' shades of purple, blue and grey.

This time we have an alnico Burstbucker 3 at the bridge – not a budget option my any means – and a neck pickup called a P-90H Sidewinder. This represents Gibson's latest attempt to create something that looks and sounds like a P90 but bucks hum like a... well, you know. It has twin coils laid on their side with a single line of polepieces in the middle, and is apparently based on the old EB-0 bass pickup design. Again we have an onboard 15dB boost, but this time we keep both tone controls and access the boost circuit with a push-push function (don't try to pull it!) on one of them. The volume controls are also push-push types, for more coil-tapping larks.

The quality of finish and fretting is good again, though unbound Gibson necks never feel exactly luxurious; and if the tuners look a bit suspicious, that's because this model comes fitted with the Min-ETune system so they're not really tuners at all – press a button on the back of the headstock and it does all that for you. Despite this extra bulk at the neck end, the Futura is ever so slightly lighter than the Classic, probably because it has 'modern' weight relief, meaning the hidden chambers are more extensive.

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FACTFILE
2014 LES PAUL FUTURA

DESCRIPTION
Solidbody electric guitar. Made in USA
PRICE **£879 inc. hard case**

BUILD **Mahogany body with maple top, set mahogany neck, 22-fret rosewood fingerboard, Tun-O-Matic bridge and stopbar tailpiece**
ELECTRICS **Uncovered Burstbucker 3 (bridge) and P-90H Sidewinder (neck), three-way switch, individual volumes with push-push coil-tap, individual tone controls with push-push boost switch on bridge**
LEFT-HANDERS **Yes**
FINISH **Inverness green, plum insane, Pacific blue, brilliant red, champagne, bullion gold**

SCALE LENGTH
630mm/24.75"
NECK WIDTH
Nut 43mm
12th fret 53mm
DEPTH OF NECK
First fret 20.5mm
Ninth fret 22.5mm
STRING SPACING
Nut 37mm
Bridge 51mm
ACTION AS SUPPLIED
12th fret treble 1.5mm
12th fret bass 2mm
WEIGHT **4.2kg/9.3lbs**

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Pleasingly plankish alternative to the Les Paul, with the same pickups and available in the same colours; all you lose is the maple top
RRP **£799**

Duesenberg
49er
Art deco styling sets this apart from the usual LP wannabes; pickups are Doozy's own Grand Vintage humbucker and DP90
RRP **£1149**

Custom 77
Roxy DL3
Semi-hollow LP-meets-Mosrite oddball with one f-hole, a humbucker at the bridge, a P90 at the neck and a Wilkinson wraparound bridge
RRP **€895**

Solid finish hides a chambered mahogany body with a maple cap

Vintage keys keep a traditional look from the front

With the Futura the boost is a short-cut to pure metal, but the P-90H lacks the snappy articulation of a real P90

Sounds

The Futura has a touch more midrange in its acoustic voice than the Classic, and that's accentuated by the eager aggression of the Burstbucker. It's still very much a Lester but this is a more naturally rock-minded instrument in tone as well as looks, and more prone to harshness if you're not careful with your amp settings. This time the onboard boost is a short cut to pure metal – and while the trimpot has had to be tucked into an awkward corner of the control cavity because of the second tone knob, it's worth getting in there at least once: the factory setting seems to be about halfway, but you'll surely want to crank the little blighter to full blast.

The Sidewinder, on the other hand, is about as metal as a satsuma. It's noticeably quieter than the Burstbucker and gets somewhat outnumbered in the middle position, at least while the other pickup has both coils firing. Still, on its own it has a smooth, jazzy voice that opens up enough new sonic possibilities to make this qualify as a real multi-dimensional guitar. With or without the coil-tap engaged, however, it lacks the snappy articulation of a real P90.

The Min-ETune tunes all six strings at the push of a button, and it has no obvious effect on the look of the guitar (at least from the front). You might need to strum the open strings more than once to get all six in line, at which point the LEDs blink a couple of times and then go off. Brilliant. The tiny control panel allows you to select different tunings, making it a godsend for anyone who's sick of turning round to grab an open-tuned instrument from their guitar tech before remembering they don't have a guitar tech. It's more than a gimmick; maybe 10 years from now it will be a part of electric guitar design that we all take for granted – and non-self-tuning Les Pauls will be strictly for the fuddy-duddy purists. Well, maybe...

No binding and acrylic inlays with a 120th banner at the octave

Verdict

Gibson has a lot of customers who think the history of the electric guitar ended in 1961 – or maybe wish it had – and a lot of potential new customers who have grown up in a post-grunge era of pickup upgrades, wiring mods and zany custom refins. So finding the best of both worlds isn't an ideal – it's a life-or-death challenge. As an attempt to bridge that almost impossible gap, it's hard to deny that the 2014 Les Paul Classic is pretty great. Reservations about the fretboard binding aside, the modernising touches have been cleverly designed and are substantial enough to make this a genuinely versatile player's guitar for our times – yet it can still look and sound like a 'real' Les Paul.

The Futura is less likeable, but not because of its more overtly forward-looking design – with a true P90 in the neck position, and a slightly different outcome to the meeting where they discussed colour schemes, this could have been a green goddess. Its best asset is perhaps the Min-ETune system. Simple, discreet and effective, this is sadly not an optional extra for all of the 2014 Gibsons – it comes as standard on some models and is not available on the rest – so it will be interesting to see whether or not it manages to win itself a bigger role in the 2015 range.

FINAL SCORE

2014 LES PAUL FUTURA	
Build Quality	**17**/20
Playability	**18**/20
Sound	**17**/20
Value for money	**18**/20
Vibe	**16**/20
TOTAL	**86%**

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VIGIER
Excalibur Thirteen

If you fancy adding a French accent to your vocabulary of guitar sounds then the Vigier Excalibur Thirteen has panache and je ne sais quoi to spare. Review by **Marcus Leadley**

Vigier is an enigmatic brand that's managed to carve out a very particular niche. The company's been around since 1980 and by maintaining production at around 300 instruments a year has created an air of high-end exclusivity, with all the guitars and basses being designed and produced in France using French timber and parts. The early Arpege and Marilyn models established a commitment to innovation while riffling heavily on body styles designed to appeal to rock and metal players. The Excalibur, a relatively straightforward instrument by Vigier standards, joined the party in 1991. The Thirteen was introduced as a limited edition in 2013, and has now joined the range as a permanent production model.

Carbon fibre neck? Metal fretboard? No, not this time – the Thirteen has an alder body and a bolt-on maple neck. However, the guitar's not without its unique features: the neck is reinforced with a carbon fibre insert that replaces the traditional truss rod; there is no separate fingerboard, and stainless steel frets are set directly into the maple. Stainless steel is much harder that the standard wire, it doesn't tarnish and lasts considerably longer. However it's also much harder to dress, so it's only really an option where precision manufacturing is the order of the day.

Another familiar Vigier quirk is the combination of a zero fret with a Teflon nut. The zero fret ensures a great first-position action and minimises pitch errors between fretted and unfretted notes, while the nut simply ensures accurate string spacing.

Lightweight alder body with a traditional square-shaped heel

The Thirteen has locking tuners and a reinforced neck instead of a truss rod

The Thirteen's features include stainless frets, a carbon-fibre neck insert, a zero fret and Flexretainer string retention

As well as oversized locking tuners, the headstock sports a patented Flexretainer string retention system that replaces the more traditional string trees. The top B and E strings each pass though what looks like (and probably is) the ferrule of a guitar string, while a short length of string/wire passes through a hole in the headstock and anchors into a neatly-machined retainer. The system is height-adjustable so the string tension over the nut can be precisely set. It's a small but clever feature that sums up Vigier's unique approach.

At the other end of the string path we have the 2011 tremolo bridge. It's a well-designed, fully-adjustable piece of hardware that will suit players who like a whammy but don't need the extreme range offered by a Floyd Rose. ➔

FACTFILE
VIGIER EXCALIBUR THIRTEEN

DESCRIPTION **Solid body electric guitar. Made in France.**
PRICE **£2299 including Hiscox hardcase**

BUILD **Lightweight two-piece alder body, four-bolt D-profile maple neck with carbon-fibre reinforcement. Integral maple fingerboard with 24 stainless steel frets plus zero fret, Teflon nut, Vigier oversized locking machineheads, patented Flexretainer string retention system, Vigier 2011 tremolo bridge. Rosewood fretboard option**
ELECTRICS **Two Amber Rock humbucking pickups, five-way selector switch, master tone and volume controls. Selector positions 2, 3 and 4 offer single coil sounds. Kill switch**
LEFT-HANDERS **No**
FINISH **Monarchy gold, black knight**

SCALE LENGTH
650mm/25.6"
NECK WIDTH
Nut 42mm
12th fret 52.8mm
DEPTH OF NECK
First fret 19.5mm
12th fret 23mm
STRING SPACING
Nut 35mm
Bridge 53mm
ACTION AS SUPPLIED
12th fret treble 1mm
12th fret bass 2mm
WEIGHT **3kg/6.6lbs**

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Another tone monster for those with deeper pockets with 24 stainless steel frets on a pau ferro fingerboard, a maple bolt on neck, alder body and two humbuckers
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Custom Artist
Alder body, maple neck with a choice of maple or rosewood fingerboards. A mini toggle switch gives you access to additional sounds from the humbuckers using series/parallel and split wiring. Loads of custom options to choose from.
RRP **£2100**

Tom Anderson
Cobra S
A similar sonic formula but with a shorter 24.75" scale length. Many colour options available and some seriously figured timber
RRP **£1958**

The Vigier comes with two dozen fat stainless steel frets

The Thirteen's electrics are fairly straightforward, but with a twist. As well as the master tone and volume control you get a little black dot, a kill switch for stuttering on/off effects. It's something you can do on a guitar has independent volumes – set one pickup to zero output and flick the pickup selector – but this is evidence of a more intentional design. The Vigier Amber humbuckers are wired through a five-way selector. In positions 1 and 5 you get the bridge and neck humbuckers respectively; in positions 2 and 4 you have the single coil sounds, while position 3 gives you both pickups in single coil mode.

Unamplified the Excalibur sounds extremely bright and vibrant. The feel is percussive and the neck is very fast; indeed, it's relatively slight when compared with many contemporary retro-inspired instruments. The matte varnish reminds us of a late '90s/early 2000s Standard Strat, so it's a familiar feel. The stainless frets offer little or no resistance and once you get used to them, returning to a slightly older instrument with tarnished nickel silver frets definitely feels like a step back. While the Thirteen is a 24-fret instrument the heel joint is cut square in a traditional style, so access past the 22nd fret requires a bit of gymnastics.

Sounds

This guitar's a bit like a rock sandwich. The humbuckers deliver chewy substance in positions 1 and 5, while in between you have three softer, tastier tones for bright, melodic clean playing or edgy driven or effected work. Given that you can coil-tap a humbucker it seems strange that this practical 'best of both worlds' setup isn't more common, but half a humbucker doesn't automatically deliver a great single-coil sound. However, Vigier has come up with a formula that works brilliantly in both modes. The trick seems to be focussing on what humbuckers and single coils do best and not trying to voice the perfect humbucker before simply splitting it in half.

The natural character of the Amber units is quite mid-forward which, in the bridge position, doesn't make it an ideal choice for clean chords, but it does create an exceptional wailing lead voice with lots of pick-edge character and an explosive attack. It's also great for power chords, prog and metal riffing. Selector position 2 brings on single coil mode and the sound becomes much more three-dimensional and open. Here you can play chiming clean chords, wind up the gain for a very effective electric blues tone, or push the action

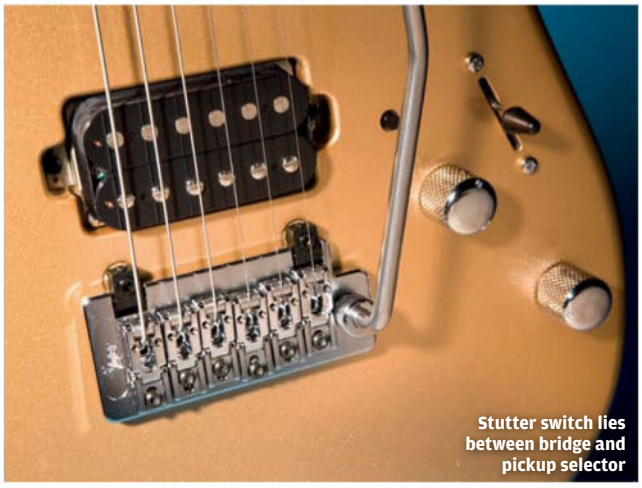
harder for a real Strat-type lead voice. The middle position sounds funky and characterful and the lack of any hum suggests phase cancelling, which should make it useful for the studio. The sound is broader and less quacky than the Stratocaster equivalent, so it's a little more anonymous – in a good way.

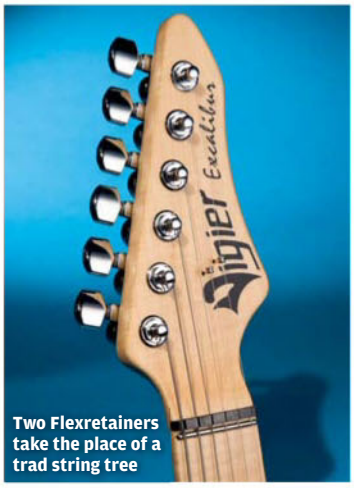
Moving on to the neck pickup, the humbucker/single coil sounds are also very good and there's a lot of territory to explore. The humbucker has a dark aspect that can be quite Les Paul-like, but more '80s than PAF. This is great for rock chords or the more fruity end of clean comping. The single coil sound has a hi-fi clarity that makes it a very good starting point for effects use.

Finally the kill switch is a bit of fun, but apart from the odd stutter or brief rhythmic interjection we don't see it as a massively useful tool. Maybe you could learn Morse code and start tapping hidden messages into the fabric of your solos?

Verdict

The Excalibur Thirteen is a very flexible and classy guitar. It has its own feel and playing dynamics, and offers a wide palette of sounds. It can deliver across a range of genres but performs especially well where fast, furious and accurate soloing is required. It's a superb jazz-rock instrument, well voiced for rock rhythm playing, and an ideal studio choice. While the hardware and timber are excellent and every aspect of construction is outstanding, the price does seem on the steep side, but it does place this Vigier in the same league as high-end offerings from the likes of Tom Anderson and Suhr. For those who can afford to flash the cash, the Excalibur is a worthy instrument that should be on your list of options.


Stutter switch lies between bridge and pickup selector



Two Flexretainers take the place of a trad string tree

FINAL SCORE

VIGIER EXCALIBUR THIRTEEN	
Build Quality	**19**/20
Playability	**18**/20
Sound	**18**/20
Value for money	**16**/20
Looks	**17**/20
TOTAL	**88%**

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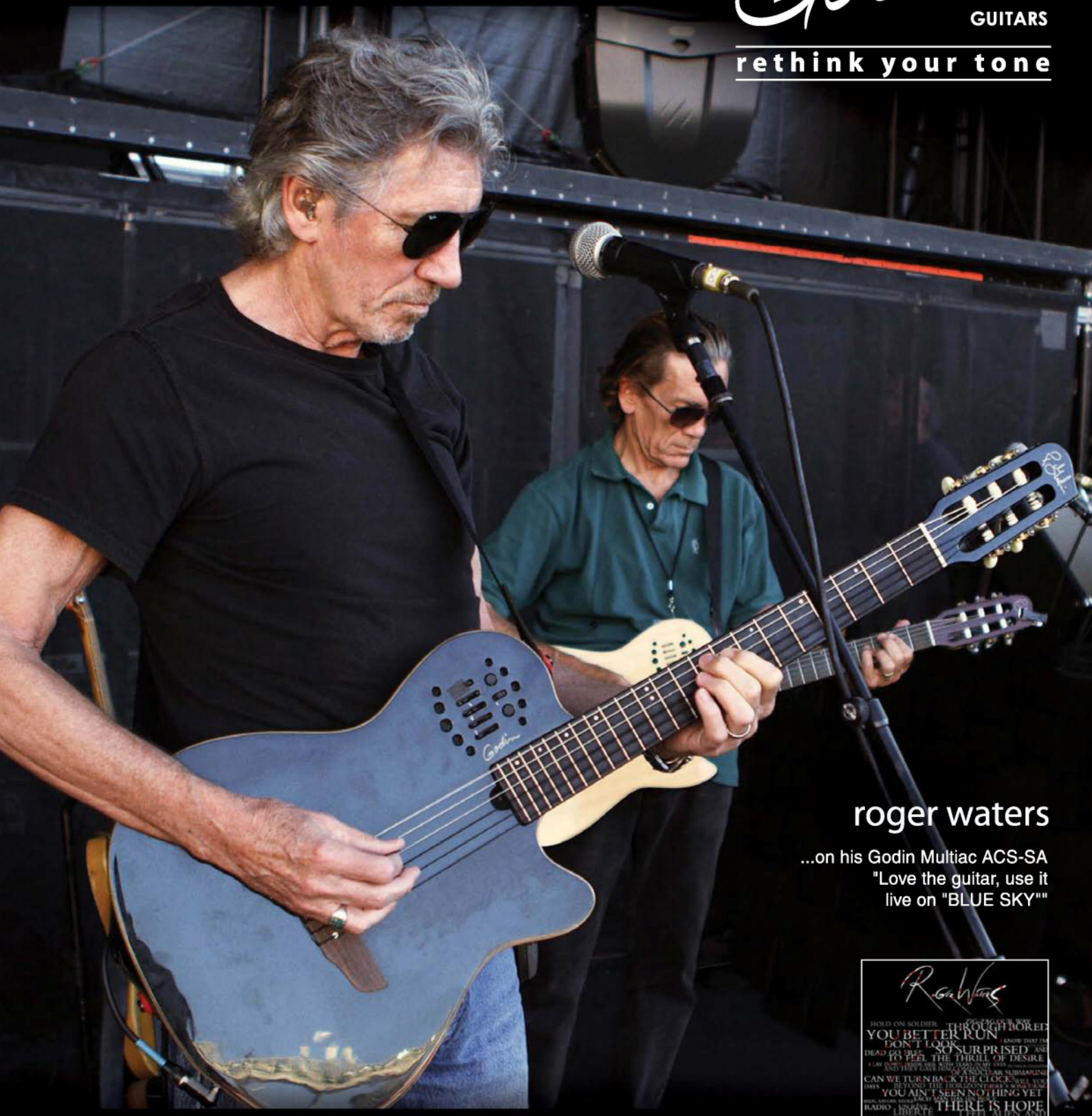

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YERASOV
Classic 50

Bigger, louder and much, much blacker, can the Russian company's new all-valve combo impress us as much as the award-winning 15-watter did last year? Review by **Huw Price**

FACTFILE

YERASOV CLASSIC 50 COMBO

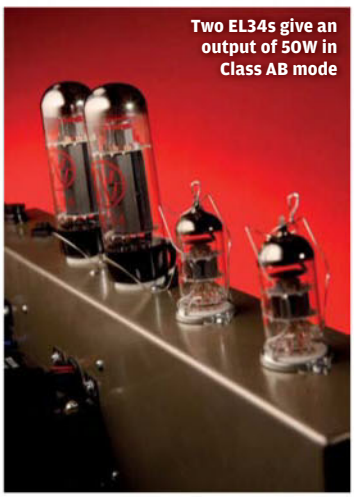
DESCRIPTION **Single-channel 50/12W valve combo with 12" Celestion Vintage 30. Made In Russia**
PRICE **£649 inc. P&P**

CONTROLS **Bass, Middle, Treble, Volume & Presence plus Bright, Class A/AB 7 Standby switches**
VALVES **2 x ECC83, 2 x EL34**
DIMENSIONS **525mm x 455mm x 240mm**
WEIGHT **19kg/41.8lbs**

CONTACT **Yerasov**
0753 442 9269
www.yerasov.co.uk

Regular readers may recall an unassuming little brown box that appeared seemingly out of nowhere to win the annual *Guitar & Bass* award for Best Amp Under £1000 back in 2013. The Yerasov GTA 15 didn't look like much, but it dished up such seriously fine valve tones at such a great price that we were prepared to forgive any lack of visual panache. We wouldn't flatter ourselves by claiming that the guys at Yerasov took any notice of our opinions, but judging by this month's new offering, the company design department is gradually closing the gap on the techies.

Okay, so there's nothing ground-breaking going on here, but the Classic 50 does have a plywood '50s style combo cabinet with silver-grey speaker cloth over a floating baffle, black tolex and a sturdy dogbone handle that looks like leather, even if it isn't. Best of all, it's rather nicely put together. We particularly like the greenish hue of the textured silver coating on the steel chassis. The legending appears to be silk screened on top and the whole thing has a oddly nostalgic 'Eastern Bloc' charm. The way the collars securing the switches align with the tops of the switch body shafts is a lovely touch. It's a minor and perhaps insignificant detail, but, as guitar hacks, these things matter to us... sad as it may seem. On the downside the chickenhead knobs aren't the nicest we've seen and the indicator light is a bit 'industry standard'; even so, the Classic 50 is only a classy set of knobs, a jewel light and a leather handle away from boutique standards. So let's hope the insides are up to snuff.


Two EL34s give an output of 50W in Class AB mode

The Celestion Vintage 30 is only rated at 60W but it seems to cope okay

The build quality is painstakingly tidy and the valve array includes two ECC83s and a pair of EL34s, all JJ-branded

Deploying the screwdriver reveals that Yerasov combine PCB construction with point-to-point wiring. Overall the build quality is painstakingly tidy, and the components include a mixture of metal and carbon film resistors, Jamicon electrolytic capacitors and highly regarded WIMA signal capacitors. The valve array includes two ➔

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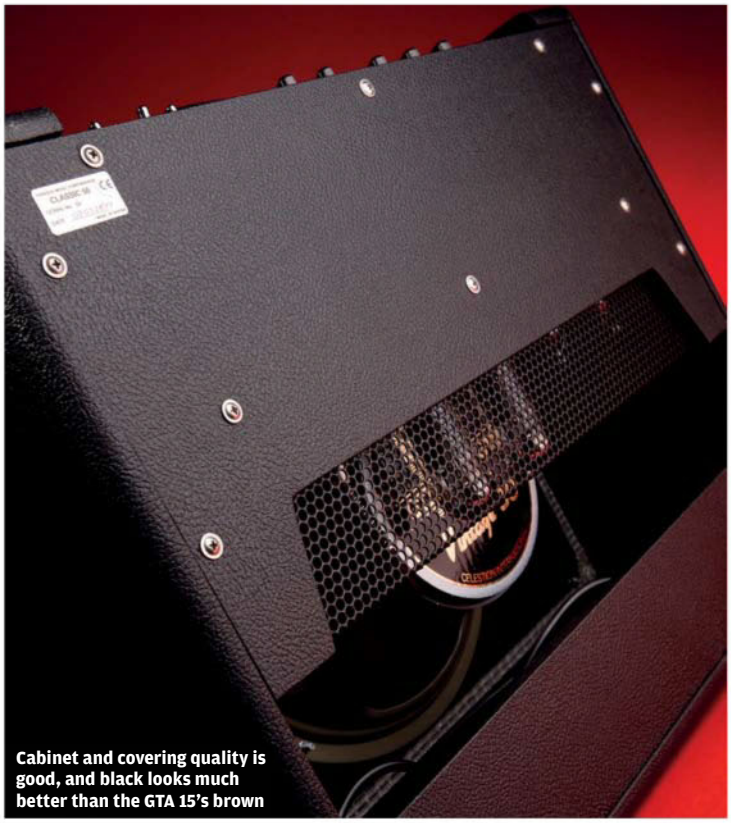
Hot Rod Deluxe
Popular combo with a 12" Celestion G12P-80 speaker, three 12AX7s and two 6L6s, two channels with s three-function footswitch, reverb. Comes with cover
RRP **£683**

Peavey
Delta Blues
30W combo with three 12AX7s and four EL84s, twin-channel preamp, one 15" Blue Marvel, tremolo, pre- and post-gain on lead channel, normal volume on clean channel, 3-band passive EQ, boost switch, reverb, footswitchable channel switching and tremolo, plus FX loop
RRP **£693**

VOX
AC30 C2
All-valve combo with three 12AX7s and four EL84s producing 30W, two Celestion G12M Greenbacks, four Inputs. Controls include Top Boost, treble/bass, reverb tone/level, tremolo speed/depth, tone cut and master volume
RRP **£637**



Cabinet and covering quality is good, and black looks much better than the GTA 15's brown

The Classic 50 is a fine amp for those who want a no-frills valve sound and those who get their drive from pedals

ECC83s and two EL34s. All are JJ-branded and sit in chassis-mounted ceramic sockets. Whoever devised the layout clearly knows what they're doing, because all the signal cable runs are about as short as they could be. They're also kept well away from the heater wires, and the PCBs are offset from heat-generating power valves.

Like the GTA 15, the Classic 50 has a line input socket as well as a regular guitar input, so line-level signals from multi-FX processors and digital modellers can be used and they are routed straight to the volume control, bypassing the Classic 50's tone stack. The guitar input is routed through a fully-featured equalisation section with controls for bass, middle, treble and presence, along with a bright switch.

Speaker output is fixed at 8 Ohm and the driver supplied is a Celestion G12 Vintage 30. Its 60W power rating may seem a tad marginal given the Classic 50's Class AB power rating, but it will hardly be stressed by the 12W generated in Class A mode. The mode switch is conveniently located on the control panel right next to the Anode (standby) switch.

No master volume, but reasonable tonal adaptability via a three-band EQ plus a Presence knob

Sounds

We'd guess that the Classic 50's circuit is derived from the era when Marshalls crossed over with Fenders. Setting the EQ controls to noon, Class AB mode is gutsier than a Fender and has chewier mids, but the overdrive doesn't get quite as heavy or crunchy as a Plexi.

Class A mode provides more of a contrast in dynamics and feel rather than in volume and tone. As you might expect, there's less clean headroom but the overall response is more touch-sensitive and you can feel the valvey compression. The upper mids and treble are also softened to an extent, but so is the bass response.

In Class A things stay clean up to around 6, morph into overdrive between 7 and 8 then hit maximum drive at 9. This is old-school stuff, so endless sustain isn't on the cards with Fenders, although you might get away with it in a bluesy sort of way with a set neck and humbuckers.

The equalisation controls are extremely effective without sounding forced or artificial, so extreme settings still produce very useable tones. The Classic 50 naturally generates a lot of low end, so we rolled back the bass and played around with the middle, treble and presence. If you reduce the mids, then the Fender influence is evident; if you decrease the treble and presence the Classic 50 has a tweedy quality, and then you can swing things towards plexi-tone by dialing up the presence. Add more treble and it's more like a cranked up medium-sized blackface-era Fender – minus the reverb.

Verdict

Rather than attempt a huge range of sounds, the Classic 50 concentrates on high-quality 'bread and butter' valve tone. All things considered this is a very fine amp for those who want a basic, no-frills straight-through valve amp, or prefer to run their amps fairly clean and get their drive textures, reverb and modulation from pedals. It also generates very little hiss and hum, and it's built to a quality that exceeds expectations at this price level.

FINAL SCORE

YERASOV CLASSIC 50	
Build Quality	**19**/20
Versatility	**16**/20
Sound	**18**/20
Value for money	**17**/20
Vibe	**18**/20
TOTAL	**88%**

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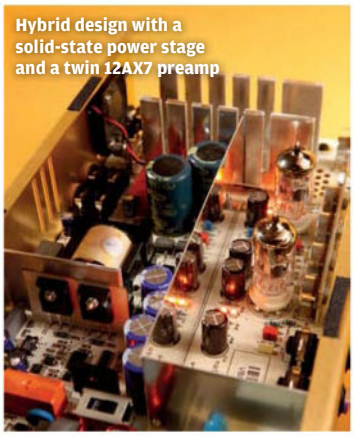
MATRIX
Elements VB800 Head

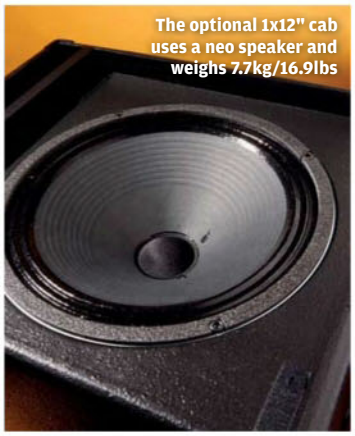
Can you really get the tone and power of a British-voiced rig without any of the shoulder-wrenching heft? Review by **Martyn Casserly**

Let's face it, most gigs we play these days are in pokey clubs, pubs, or wedding venues where a 100W head and 4x12" cab arrangement are about as useful as a 2015 product catalogue from Blackberry. That's assuming of course that you have a van that will get your stuff there in the first place, and then that you can summon the strength of five tigers to carry it all up some ludicrously tiny stairwell. In moments like these, that Fender Twin which seemed so cool in the shop takes on a Sisyphean quality. To add insult to – quite probably – hernial injury, you finally set up on the postage stamp-sized stage only to find the sound guy has turned you down to a level where those tubes are barely warm. It's going to be a long night.

The thing is, we love that classic valve sound – the responsiveness, aural charm, and brutish power – but we don't want to hump the damn things around. Can nothing be done to save us from our desperate plight? Well, belay those thoughts of digital modelry, because on these very isles is something that might just be your salvation.



Hybrid design with a solid-state power stage and a twin 12AX7 preamp



The optional 1x12" cab uses a neo speaker and weighs 7.7kg/16.9lbs

The Matrix VB800 combines a valve-powered preamp with the luxury of a weight-reducing solid state power amp

The Matrix VB800 is a very lightweight head that combines the flavour of a valve-powered preamp section with the weight-reducing luxury of a solid state power amp. Now while the purists recoil in horror at the very thought, it would be well to note that Matrix Amplification has been building a big reputation behind the scenes thanks to its GT-FX range of rackmount amps that have been used by pros on stages all around the world. The VB800 is not some cheap Chinese-made compromise to fill a market sector in the company's portfolio; it's an impressive little unit that packs quite a punch.

While there are several other mini heads available – Tiny Terror, ➔

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FACTFILE
MATRIX ELEMENTS VB800 HEAD

DESCRIPTION **400W solid state/valve hybrid amp head. 2 x 12AX7s in preamp stage. Made In the UK**
PRICE **£549**

CONTROLS **Gain, master volume, three-band EQ, High and Low inputs, Send and Return FX loop input/output, Send Level control. Send output doubles as DI out; Return input doubles as direct input to power amp stage. Power mode switch on motherboard**
DIMENSIONS **30.4cm x 18.5cm x 8cm**
WEIGHT **1.8kg/4lbs**
CABINET OPTIONS
Neolite NL12 1x12", £336; NL212 2x12", £498

CONTACT **Matrix Amplification support@matrixamplification.com 0845 108 54 49 uk.matrixamplification.com/**

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Orange
Tiny Terror
It might not get up to the high watt counts of the VB800, but this trailblazing design pretty much started the mini head craze. Still one of the best
RRP **£365**

Laney
Ironheart IRT-Studio
A rackmountable version of Laney's Ironheart series, this slim beast sports an all-valve three channel setup, built in reverb, and digital outputs
RRP **£399**

Marshall
JCM800 2203 100W Head
If the classic British roar is what you're after then this should be at the top of your list. A vintage classic reissued for the modern day... but, woah, that price
RRP **£1559**

Dead simple control layout with gain, volume and a three-band EQ

The VB800's classic British rasp owes much to a certain early '80s amplifier favoured by top hat-wearing guitar gods

Blackstar H5, and Vox AC4 to name a few – they mostly retain the 'lunchbox' style of construction, with handles and boxy bodies. The VB800 looks more akin to something that might sit comfortably in a hi-fi system, although that's not to say it seems delicate. Weighing in at around 4lbs, the VB800 is lighter than most laptops. Removing the metal top plate reveals a low, rectangular, unibody chassis finished in a bronzy gold colour that looks not unlike another classic British amp manufacturer's livery.

Within the chassis is a neat, if somewhat cosy, PCB board that houses the solid -state power amp section, and two directly mounted ECC83s/12AX7s for its preamp tone. The circuitry behind the power stage is based on Matrix's Class A/B MOSFET design, which the company asserts will break the poor image that solid-state power stages gained during the '80s and '90s.

One other useful feature is a power mode switch on the motherboard that allows the user to quickly change between 240v and 110v, which would prove very useful if you're on tour and don't want to fiddle about with step-down transformers.

As this is a single-channel amp the front panel is simple, with just a power button, high and low inputs, three band EQ, plus gain and master volume. There's also an LED marked SIG, which according to Matrix gives you 'an indication of how much power the amplifier is outputting at a given impedance'. If it's flickering then it's running at around 12.5 per cent, which when paired with a 4ohm speaker will give you around 50W, while full-on means closer to 25 per cent, which equates to 105W. Those mathematicians amongst you will have calculated that this makes the full output of the VB800 to be around 400W. That's pretty loud for a little box, although we're still not really sure how useful that light will be.

Around the back there are twin outputs for speakers, Send and Return for the FX loop, and a Send Level control. The loop is multipurpose, as the Send socket doubles as a DI out and can also be used (with a suitable interface) to record directly into a DAW, although there's no cabinet voicing so you'll need to pair the signal with a virtual one in your computer. We tested this out and were pleased to find a strong, rich tone coming through with plenty of life. The Return socket also acts as a direct input to the power stage, meaning you can use the VB800 to beef up an existing preamp or modelling device. Handy.

Sounds

As the name and livery might suggest, the VB800 owes much of its inspiration to a certain early '80s amp favoured by top-hat wearing rock gods. Paired with Matrix's own NL12 cab – which is also ridiculously lightweight – the VB800 spits out a classic British rasp that sounds instantly familiar. There's an immediacy to the tone, especially on cleaner settings, that can be a little unforgiving at times, but with the gain increased this becomes a definite advantage. The throaty roar exuding from the amp is full of power and grit, with sharp edges that can be a touch harsh until you tame the EQ.

It's loud, too. At home you'll have the volume control way down low to stop any domestic disturbance court cases, but due to the solid state power stage this doesn't steal much away from the sound. Moving to a rehearsal/gigging setting shows that there's a respectable amount of headroom for clean to edgy breakup, and the VB800 reacts nicely to TS-style pedals that firm up the overdriven voice. This is of course a vintage-style amp so you'll need pedals if you want heavy distortion or lead boosts, and reverb would help the clean tones enormously. It does sound great when it's cooking though, and while the lightweight NL12 lacks somewhat in the low end, we reckon a 4x12" would roar.

Verdict

There's plenty to like about the VB800. It's remarkably light, yet delivers loud and toneful sounds. It's entering a fierce part of the market, and while £549 is fair, it does place the unit about £200 more than the street cost of a Tiny Terror, which comes with a carry case. It all comes down to whether you want the particular British sound that the VB800 sets out, with a good degree of success, to recreate. If that's the case this amp will get you a good part of the way, and save your back a lot of pain.

You can use the FX loop send as a DI out or bypass the preamp via the FX loop return

FINAL SCORE

MATRIX ELEMENTS VB800 HEAD	
Build Quality	**17**/20
Playability	**18**/20
Sound	**17**/20
Value for money	**16**/20
Vibe	**17**/20
TOTAL	**85%**

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DINOSAURAL
OPA-101 Overdriven Pre-Amp

Transparent yet muscular, we reckon this new overdrive from the UK's Dinosaural could be a future classic. Review by **Richard Purvis**

Do an eBay search for 'Lovetone' and, once you've filtered out the clones, you're left with an array of stompboxes from the late '90s priced anywhere between £400 and £600-plus. Sweet baby Jesus, why? Because these were unique and cool-sounding pedals, they were made in England in limited numbers, and they had big-name fans ranging from J Mascis to Gary Moore – a perfect recipe to get tone-hungry collectors salivating all over the 'buy it now' button. Lovetone designer Dan Coggins went on to found Dinosaural in 2002, producing just one more pedal – a stunningly good overdrive called the Tube Bender – and then everything went quiet.

Until, just last year, the dinosaur awoke. Coggins is back in the game after six years of silence with a new stomper, the OPA-101 Overdriven Pre-Amp, based on the Tube Bender but redesigned and with just two controls, Drive and Level. There's also a secret weapon that you might be glad of when the pedal isn't even on: hidden under a corner of the circuit board next to the battery compartment is a tiny slider switch for selecting buffered output or hardwired true bypass. Do you want to give your guitar sound a friendly push to compensate for signal degradation through the whole cable run, or would you rather let it glide by untouched? As both schools have their fanatical followers, it's probably a shrewd move to offer the choice.

The pedal looks humble enough with its textured black finish, slightly fussy lettering and the same bumpy knobs as its silver-cased predecessor. We're promised transparent, dynamic, valve-like overdrive, and at this price we ought to get it.

Sounds

The OPA-101 comes with a double-sided A4 sheet of instructions, which might seem ever so slightly excessive for a pedal with two controls, but it's worth taking at least one line of the advice it offers: to start with Drive at minimum and Level at noon for a 'fairly clean' sound that's not too far away from the bypass tone. Well, it is fairly clean, but you wouldn't eat chips off it. Your guitar still sounds very much like your guitar, but warmed up and softened down by an extra layer of amp-like gain. Turn the Drive towards halfway and the hairiness gets progressively more lush, but it's still beautifully natural and responsive.

The only problem is that, once you start pushing this oh-so-smooth overdrive into full-on fuzz – as promised on the second half of the Drive control – things will surely begin to get mushy. Won't they? No, they chuffing well won't. With higher gain comes a pronounced hike in harmonic richness, and the top end grinds into life for both silky chords and cutting lead work. Close to maximum Drive you arrive at something like the boopy sustain of a Big Muff, but with less mid-scoop and more definition – which is to say you can still tell which pickup you're on.

So does switching to true bypass make any difference to the clean sound? Not much. There's maybe a sliver of top end lost in comparison to the buffered output, and this might be more pronounced if you're using the Dinosaural alongside non-buffered pedals with long cables at either end. Don't lose sleep over it, though.

Verdict

Stompboxes are for stomping on, not investing in, but the likely collectability of anything bearing Dan Coggins' fingerprints is just one of the reasons why you should consider taking a closer look at the OPA-101. The main reason is that it sounds glorious.

FINAL SCORE	
OPA-101 OVERDRIVEN PRE-AMP	
Build Quality	**19**/20
Usability	**17**/20
Sound	**20**/20
Value for money	**17**/20
Vibe	**19**/20
TOTAL	**92%**

FACTFILE
Dinosaural OPA-101 Overdriven Pre-Amp

SPECS **Overdrive pedal. Made in UK**
RRP **£199.99**

CONTROLS **Drive, Level; internal switch for buffered/hardwired output; input for 9v adapter**

CONTACT **Dinosaural**
07733 016732
dinosaural.com
thegigrig.com
guitarexperience.co.uk

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You've bought the guitar of your dreams, you've invested in a set of bespoke pickups, and you've even had an amp built. So what's next? Perhaps the time has come for a custom-made guitar strap, and with prices starting from £60, a TCR strap should definitely be on your list.

As a trained saddler, Tamsin Raymond's work is all about quality and durability. She sources mostly English vegetable-dyed shoulder leather in 2mm or 3mm thicknesses. Stitching is done entirely by hand rather than machine, so if a stitch is damaged then the rest won't unravel.

Tamsin can make vintage repro straps for Fenders and Gibsons, along with cowboy straps for Gretsches. She can even transfer original metalwork to an exact replica if your original is worn out. Those with a custom design or colour scheme in mind can simply email or call up to discuss their requirements, provide measurements and get a quote.

Obviously a strap cannot improve the sound of your guitar so the assessment criteria have to be comfort, durability and build quality. The smell of the two straps we have here is intoxicating, and the leather feels both supple and strong. The buckles are reassuringly weighty and retainers for the excess strap tongues are a classy touch. The 2.5" wide strap actually made our Les Paul seem a bit lighter, and we liked the '60s-style shoulder pad strap so much that we bought it. We would expect both to withstand decades of use.

Verdict

TCR are offering primo quality, custom-made guitar straps at a fraction of the price of most US-made alternatives. The range of leathers, colours and hardware is both exotic and extensive, and you can even choose your own style and colour of stitching. If you've decided it's time that your guitar deserves the best, then look no further.

FINAL SCORE 93%

LOGJAM
Prolog

Foot percussion pedal

PRICE **£99**
CONTACT **www.logjam.net**

When the Logjam Logarhythm first came out a few years ago, there were a few players who scoffed at the notion that it was worth spending real, actual money on an amplified piece of wood – after all, how quickly would you get bored of doing your best John Lee Hooker impersonation? However, those who tried it quickly realised what a versatile and incredibly moreish device it could be. The original, plus its subsequent incarnations, have earned their place in the pedal arena.

This latest version, originally billed as the Chris Woods Signature Edition in honour of the guitar player who helped the company develop the Prolog, promises to be the most versatile and dependable unit to date; so much so that the Prolog comes with a three-year guarantee. Built from sapele, which Logjam claim to be its most popular timber choice, the foot-shaped unit is as simple to operate as its predecessors – just put it on the floor (the non-slip rubber mat ensures it won't move whilst stomping), plug in and start playin' and stompin' your heart out.

Verdict

The pedal's simplicity to operate belies the complexity and sheer amount of sounds you can get. The Prolog lives up to its billing, as you can really tell more than ever before the difference in tones, depending on where you strike the board, how hard you strike it, and with what part of your foot. If you're like us, you'll go through every shoe and trainer you own and every pickup combination on your guitar to see if you can get the right 'kick drum' sound at three in the morning. Be warned: this pedal is incredibly addictive, and could lead to thoughts of a tap-dancing career. For solo performers looking to add some backbeats to their sound, it's a veritable gift from the gods.

FINAL SCORE 92%

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TAYLOR 814ce

Completely re-voiced with a fair few subtle design changes, does the 2014 version of the flagship 814ce still sound like a Taylor? Review by **Rick Batey**

It's a time of change for Taylor guitars. Bob Taylor, without doubt one of the most innovative guitar company leaders of the past few decades, has announced that he'll soon be stepping down – but in 2012 he nominated Andy Powell as the new master luthier to stand in his stead. This is a bold move, for Powell is no long-term Taylor man but a very individual luthier who has already shown his own ideas on how the company can move forward.

The first fruits of Powell's work were visible in the 700 series guitars of 2012, and even more so with the Grand Orchestra models of last year, with new bracing, new glue technology, and thinner finishes. Now, for 2014, he's turned his attention to the 800 series guitars, a line long hailed by Bob as the flagship of the range. This promises to be no easy-option cosmetic re-tweak, but a real reworking and revoicing. If we want to know the direction Taylor is heading, well... the chances are that we're holding the answer in our hands.

Right out of the case the new 814ce feels noticeably lighter than we expected. The Grand Auditorium body shape is a mainstay of the Taylor line and one we've always liked very much: just under 16" wide and just under 4.5" deep, it's a great do-anything size, being strummable, fingerpickable and all points inbetween, while the cutaway allows you to zoom up to the top 20th fret (where, as the old-timers are fond of saying, there is no money... but what the heck, we mostly all go there anyway). The body finish is gloss all over and around 40 per cent thinner than before, but it's still an immaculate job, faultlessly flat but with a tiny hint of grain texture showing through on the top. It's impeccable.

Indian rosewood back and sides, now with unfigured maple binding

Chrome-plated tuners for a plainer, more simple look

The Taylor Grand Auditorium is a great do-anything size, and the new 814ce feels noticeably lighter than we expected

As usual for the 800 series, the top is sitka spruce, the back and sides Indian rosewood; the former is even-grained and generously covered in medullary rays, generally a sign of spruce being cut bang on the quarter, though in this case a subtle strip of maple around the inside of the soundhole covers the tell-tale lines.

Outside that lies a band of maple, rosewood and abalone – the rosewood addition is new – and while maple is still the choice for the body binding, it's intentionally plain rather than figured, giving a cleaner look. As well as ➔

FACTFILE
TAYLOR 814CE

DESCRIPTION **Grand Auditorium-sized cutaway electro-acoustic. Made in the USA**
PRICE **£3023 inc. hard case**

BUILD **Solid sitka spruce top, solid Indian rosewood back and sides, 20-fret set mahogany neck, ebony fingerboard, bridge and headstock overlay, maple binding, abalone rosette, compensated Micarta saddle, sealed chrome machineheads**
ELECTRICS **Taylor Expression System 2**
LEFT-HANDERS **Yes**
FINISH **Gloss body, satin neck**

SCALE LENGTH
648mm/25.5"
NECK WIDTH
Nut 45mm
12th fret 55mm
DEPTH OF NECK
First fret 22mm
Ninth fret 23mm
STRING SPACING
Nut 38mm
Bridge 55mm
ACTION AS SUPPLIED
12th fret treble 2.0mm
12th fret bass 2.6mm
WEIGHT **1.9kg/4.2lbs**

CONTACT **Taylor Guitars**
31 (0) 20 667 6033
www.taylorguitars.com

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Like this? Try this...

Takamine
P7NC
With specs fairly close to those of the 814ce, this guitar has the all-rounder NEX cutaway body in rosewood and spruce, with maple binding, ebony board and the good-sounding CPT-2 CoolTube preamp
RRP **£2232**

Martin
GPC-Aura GT
New for this year, this useful-looking cutaway sitka/rosewood electro has a 1.75" nut and a pearl soundhole inlay. The body back and sides are satin not gloss, though; the electronics are provided by the Fishman F1 Aura Plus
RRP **£1999**

Yamaha
LSX36C
All the handbuilt goodness Yamaha can summon with Engelmann spruce and rosewood, maple binding, the ART system and abalone galore. A super-lush and underrated workhorse
RRP **£3776**

Guild
F47RC w/DTAR
USA-built Grand Orchestra in sitka/rosewood with the D-TAR system. With Guild unexpectedly changing hands, there may be some bargaining power out there
RRP **£2566.80**

There's now more kick to the wound strings, a dollop of added bounce which comes allied to bigger lower mids

that, the inner plies have also been changed with a thin strip of rosewood just inside the maple. It's a tiny offset detail which sets the whole guitar off.

Inside lies a more striking example of something being offset: the back struts are arrayed not at right-angles to the centre-line but at a diagonal, a move intended to free up the response of the back. The top bracing has also been changed from scalloped to 'parabolically' tapered. Also, vertical wood strips now provide extra reinforcement for the sides, the theory being that stiffer sides provide a more rigid, drumshell-like support for the back and the top – which, incidentally, have both been re-thicknessed for this year – in order that they can resonate more freely than before.

Undyed rosewood fingerboard and an ebony headplate

There's another structural alteration going on inside, but this time it's invisible: the back and top bracing for the 2014 models has been stuck on with a super-strong fish-derived protein glue. It's a small thing, but it's something Andy Powell believes makes a noticeable difference: according to Taylor, 'the braces provide an energy transmission network for the top and back of the guitar, and the fish glue optimises the tonal transfer'. However, traditional hot hide glue has been used for the bridge/belly interface.

Visually, the easiest way to tell this year's 800 series guitars from last year's is the scratchplate – not tortie as before, but a piece of matte-finished Indian rosewood with the grain arrayed diagonally. It's a look that only a few makers have used since the '70s or early '80s – the good old Washburn Prairie Song comes to mind – but it makes a nice change.

The ebony bridge looks essentially the same with its winged shape, abalone-trimmed ebony buttons and Micarta saddle with its swept B string compensation, but three miniscule black Allen keys in circular surrounds sitting behind the saddle alert us to the fact that this guitar comes with the recent Expression System 2. There are no body or under-fingerboard sensors here: the ES2 has all its three piezo elements in the bridge, but placed not beneath the saddle – where, Taylor says, the strings' downward pressure mean that the piezo-electric crystals 'often respond with a sound often characterised as thin, brittle or synthetic' – but right behind it.

Instead of sensing mostly downwards pressure, in fact, the ES2's pickups are designed to read the 'rocking' motion of the saddle. The Allen keys are there to let you calibrate the pressures of the sensors against the saddle, which could be a good way of solving any balance problems. The controls stay the same – Volume, Treble, Bass, all with centre-detents and situated on the upper shoulder near to the neck. The 9v PP3 battery drawer is situated by the endpin jack.

Not much has been altered when it comes to the neck. It's a full 25.5"-scale item, with a plenty spacious width of 1.75" at the nut allied to 55mm spacing at the bridge. The neck is made from mahogany which, as usual, Taylor has chosen not to stain to any great degree, so it looks fairly pale.

The neck finish is satin and the profile is as easy and comfortable as ever, a medium slim 'C' that feels slinkier than its measurements thanks to a lack of any meat in the shoulders that might slow you down. Taylor's NT heel design is also present; essentially this extends the mahogany section up into the body area, minimising the tendency for the neck to begin to 'hinge' at the 14th fret by adding extra support for the fingerboard tongue.

In fact the only neck changes are in the details. The maple binding, as on the body, is now unfigured. The fingerboard is undyed ebony with a pleasingly natural, faintly streaked dark brown appearance. The inlays echo the old diamond-like shape of before but are simpler and curvier, almost like two interlocking fish; ↔

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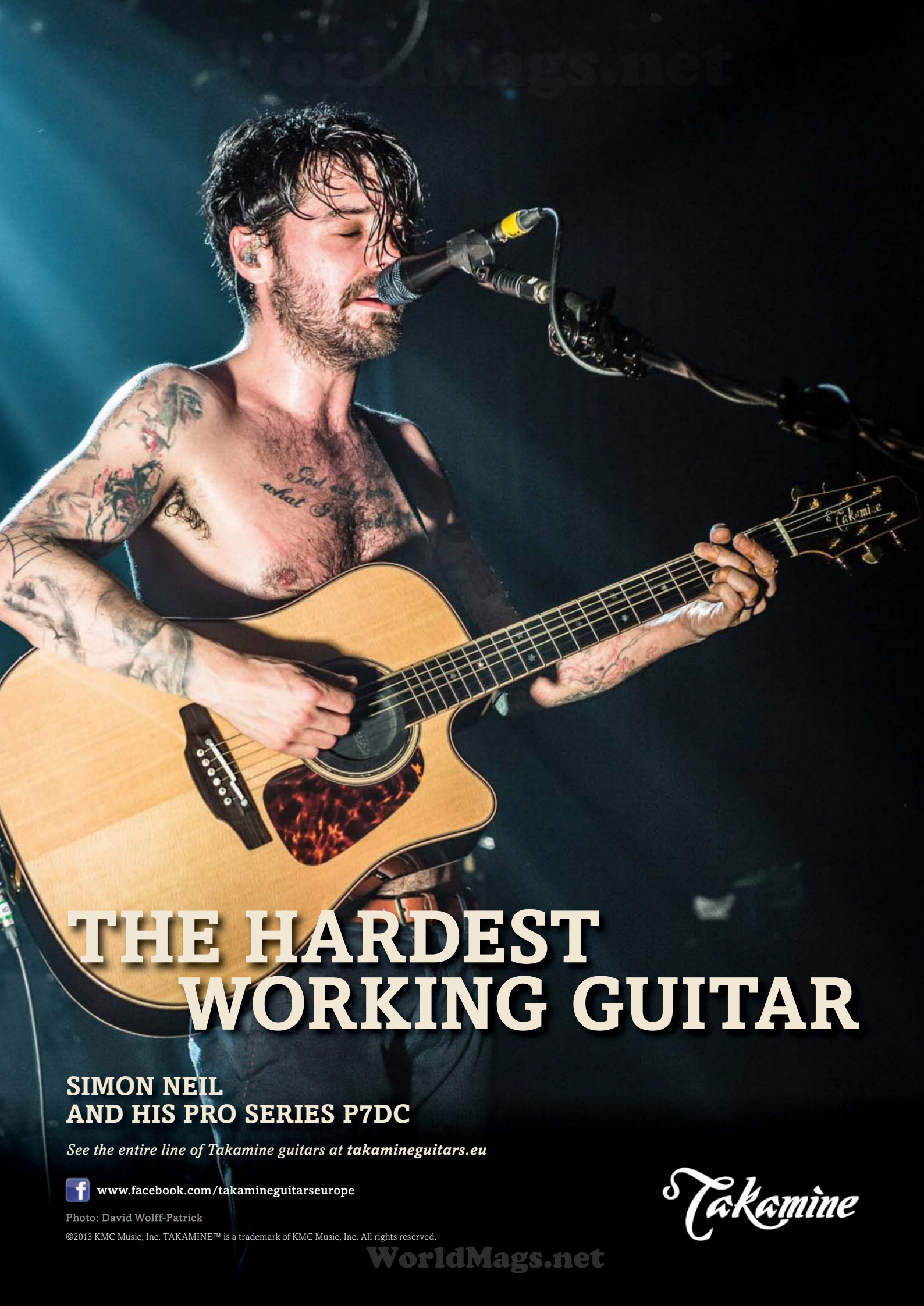

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The Expression System 2 pickup has mini Allen keys for balance adjustment

Neat combined output jack and battery holder unit

Redesigned rosette and a rosewood scratchplate

Taylor calls these the 'Element' inlays. The headstock facing is still gloss, but the wood is now ebony, not rosewood, and finally the tuners are chrome-plated, not gold. It all adds up to a more understated character.

Sound

So with all these new features – new bracing, diagonal back braces, re-thicknessed woods, side supports, new glue – is there a noticeable difference between this guitar and the 814s of old? To our ears, the answer is 'yes'. From the first touch of the plectrum there's more kick to the wound strings, a dollop of added bounce which comes allied to bigger lower mids than we expected. It really does vibrate the back of the guitar against your body.

We should mention at this point that this guitar comes strung with Elixir HD Lights with Taylor's own gauges of .013-.053 plus a slightly heavier G, but not all this subtle extra depth can be down to that. Also, it's not a global change, for this guitar does still sound like a Taylor – it's crisp and shimmery and definitely on the bright and modern side, especially out in front. But where previous rosewood 14's were fairly light on the midrange with an almost new-age style 'smile' EQ curve, this one boots up the mids and lower mids to a fair degree, with a heavier impact spread across from the A to the G string. Mostly, the change is obvious in the first position; capo'ed up, the difference is not too overt.

Under fingerpicking the 814ce does seem to have a little more under the hood when it comes to dynamics and response. Of course this also affects strumming, and you might say that the horsepower of the 2014 model favours a slightly more cultured right hand. Up the neck the instant response and even tonality across the strings remains; Taylor has mentioned that they've attempted to fatten up the trebles, and though that doesn't come across quite as strongly to us as the increase in the lower mids, the 814 does work well with a fat pick for full-toned jazzy lines.

The area in which this guitar perhaps best displays its altered character is when you use a flatpick to pick out fills and basslines between open-position chords. Those kind of moves now really muscle out and forwards in an almost bluegrassy manner, and in fact you almost have to be extra careful on the D string below the fifth fret because there's quite an overt thump waiting there that reminds us in a way of a big-bodied Lowden. We wouldn't go as far as to say that Taylor has over-cooked the sensitivity at these frequencies... but they've come close.

With no gig opportunities this week we have to judge the ES2 system through an AER combo under home conditions. There's still a hard-to-reach mini-switch located inside on the preamp board, as before, but as there's no magnetic body sensor to switch on or off, it's now a phase reverse.

Our impression is of a plenty-loud system, with gentle and well-judged parameters for the Treble and Bass controls, with a residue of the attacky characteristics of a regular undersaddle system but allied to extra fatness with a hint of the bullet-proof controllability of one of the better examples of soundhole magnetics. Less precious and zingy than before, we'd say the warmth of the more conventional ES2 together with its high resistance to feedback is a major plus.

Verdict

Over the past few decades the 814ce has had a big impact on the high end electro-acoustic market and we do think the 2014 model is a little more involving than before, particularly for those who favour a lighter touch. The neck is still super-sweet (as long as you like a wider nut), the fretwork and set up are exemplary, the intonation is as good as any and the fit and finish are top-notch; the changes, both acoustically and plugged-in, do make it a subtly more fulfilling experience.

FINAL SCORE

TAYLOR 814CE	
Build Quality	**19**/20
Playability	**18**/20
Sound	**17**/20
Value for money	**16**/20
Looks	**19**/20
TOTAL	**91%**

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MTD
Kingston Z5

Michael Tobias's MTD basses are high-end, but the import Kingston line offers the same elements for a lot less lolly. Review by **Gareth Morgan**

MTD basses are the brainchild of American luthier Michael Tobias, based in Kingston in upstate New York. Tobias he established MTD's well-known predecessor, Tobias Guitars, in 1977, but sold the concern to Gibson in 1990. Michael Tobias re-located to the Catskills and, after making 50 instruments branded Eclipse, settled on MTD as his new company name in early 1994.

As MTD only hand-builds 10 instruments per month, the prices are fairly high; one of these will cost a minimum of just under £2500. The Kingston line, however, is out-sourced to 'carefully vetted outside facilities' in China. This gives the semi-professional bassist access to the Tobias ethos for as little as £549 for a four-string Saratoga bass, one of seven different models in the Kingston series. For this month's review, we've got our hands on a rather splendid five-string Kingston Z bass.

The KZ5 re-imagines a melange of classic forms but still creates a distinct identity. The body has a core of mahogany and a top of burled maple finished in high gloss tobacco sunburst, and it's elegantly offset in the lower bouts and stylishly sweeping in the horns, with easy access to the top frets and smoothly bevelled edges all round.

The neck, secured to the body by an old-school four-bolt system, is made from a single piece of maple and is described as being 'asymmetrical' in contour. At first glance the KZ5's neck looks pretty standard, but on closer inspection you'll see that it's a little thinner on the treble side; the general idea is that this promotes better support for your hand. As this is a subtle detail and the neck is thin, it would probably take more time than we have here to give a definitive judgement on its pros and cons, but it's very comfortable and it definitely makes you want to play it. This bass also comes supplied with the Buzz Feiten tuning system; google it for a ton of info.

No-plate neckbolt system and battery access from the rear

As well as an asymmetric neck the five-string comes with a well-judged 1.75" wide nut

The Z5 has a mahogany/burled maple body, active electronics and a bolt-on maple neck with an asymmetrical profile

The distinctive back-angled headstock is finished-matched to the body and carries five sealed tuners in four up/one down configuration, like a five-string Music Man Stingray. The maple fingerboard carries a zero fret, a feature intended to equalise the tonal qualities of open strings and fretted notes, plus 24 expertly-seated medium jumbo nickel frets with a small set of black dot markers lined up along the top edge but no front markers at all.

The bridge is an MTD Quick Release bridge finished in brooding smoked chrome, as is the rest of the hardware. It's pretty much a super-solid version of the stock Fender unit. The KZ5 is loaded with active electronics, with the 9v battery housed in a separate compartment at the rear requiring the removal of two Phillips screws for access. The two MTD passive ↦

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FACTFILE
MTD Kingston Z5

DESCRIPTION **Solidbody bass. Made in China**
PRICE **£1090**

BUILD **Carved mahogany core with burled maple top, bolt-on maple neck with 24 frets on a maple fingerboard plus zero fret. Buzz Feiten Tuning System tuners and MTD quick release bridge. Smoked chrome hardware**

ELECTRICS **Active with two MTD soapbar pickups. Volume, Balance, Bass, Middle and Treble controls**
LEFT-HANDERS **Yes, for an extra £50**
FINISH **Tobacco sunburst, trans cherry red and natural finishes, all in high gloss, plus satin amber**
RANGE OPTIONS **Four-string KZ4, £1030; four-string fretless, £1090; five-string fretless, £1149; six-string KZ6, £1190; six-string fretless, £1240**

SCALE LENGTH
864mm/34"
NECK WIDTH
Nut 45mm
12th fret 68mm
DEPTH OF NECK
First fret 22mm
12th fret 23mm
STRING SPACING
Nut 10mm
Bridge 19mm
ACTION AS SUPPLIED
12th fret treble 2mm
12th fret bass 3mm
WEIGHT
3.63kg/7.98lbs

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Saber SL5 5-string Bass
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Sandberg
California TT 5-string
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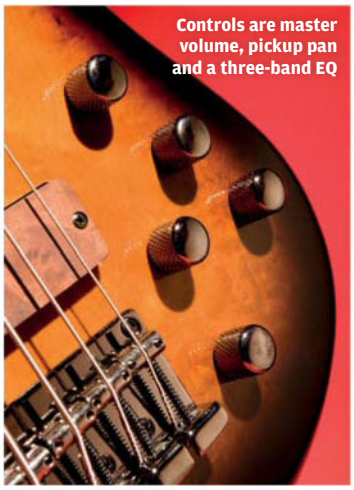
RRP **£1441**

All the MTDs come Buzz Feitenised for maximum intonation accuracy


Controls are master volume, pickup pan and a three-band EQ

The MTD Kingston Z5 is a well-made and visually appealing bass, and a joy to play in how it feels and how little it weighs

soapbar pickups have mahogany covers for a little boutique class. Alongside Volume and Balance, the knurled smoked chrome controls also include a three-band EQ.

When you first pick the KZ5 up you'll be pleasantly surprised by how light it is – just over 3.5kg/8lbs, which feels genuinely featherweight compared to many others. Like the majority of basses, it's a little headstock-biased on the lap but ultra-stable with restraining forearm or hung round your neck.

Sounds

Tonally the MTD has pretty much everything you need on hand, and all its sounds are easy to find. Starting off in twin pickup mode this bass sounds clean and even across the fretboard. There's a healthy snarl on the low strings with just a hint of high-mid zing. This zinginess provides a modern edge without excessive nasality and the highs speak out clearly, with a nice snap to the attack on the thinner strings but with enough body for practicality. Of course the B string's the thing, and the good news is that it's well-focused and fully integrated; B strings can sometimes dominate in the output level stakes, but on the Z5 it's well-attenuated.

The neck pickup on its own is less snappy at the top – it's not quite as compressed as a P-Bass, but the midrange is smoother with a darker edge and a hint of punchiness. The bottom end is bigger with plenty of raspy acoustic-isms. With the bridge pickup solo'ed, the level is again well-matched and, while a little bass-light, it's tight and burpy with a wiry snap up top. Dialling in added bass turns this into a really good contemporary pop/soul tone, the KZ retaining its clucking attack but with force, stature and width – you'll cut through effectively and still fill the necessary space.

Adding active treble into the mix provides extra zing and a brighter sheen without fret noise, although the D and G strings become a bit too brittle and nasal. With the neck pickup, same course refocuses proceedings more nicely, and this is especially useful on the B string where the naturally woollier sound affects the clarity. It's a nice old-fashioned tone with a touch more bite than you'd expect.

Adding treble when both pickups are in play brings on extra harmonics and a biting attack. This is a good pop/rock setting, though some finger rasp shows up with position changes and this eventually becomes zingy fret noise when you approach full boost.

Finally, let's try boosting the mids. With the bridge pickup, the throaty grunt induced by extra midrange is a lot of fun but even with extra bass boost it's just a little too clipped and synthetic on the D and G strings. The twin pickup setting is better, retaining its overall darker hue, and the D and G become fractionally tighter and brighter but remain useable. If you want a good basic sound then try selecting the neck pickup and boosting the mids, plus just a touch of bass and treble. It's reminiscent of the fat, snarly Billy Sheehan sound on Dave Lee Roth's *Eat 'Em And Smile* album, especially *Yankee Rose*... and that's no bad thing.

Verdict

The MTD KZ5 is a joy to play, both in terms of how it feels and how little it weighs. The sound is rather splendid; we'd like a little more quality at the high end, but the B string is really excellent, and no matter what you do EQ-wise it retains enough definition and focus. Overall the KZ5 is a well-made and visually appealing bass, and if you have to save for a couple of months longer to bring it within your reach, it'll probably be worth the wait.

Fingerboards are available in maple, rosewood or lined fretless

MTD Quick Release bridge with 19mm string spacing

FINAL SCORE	
MTD KINGSTON Z5	
Build Quality	**19**/20
Playability	**19**/20
Sound	**17**/20
Value for money	**17**/20
Vibe	**17**/20
TOTAL	**89%**

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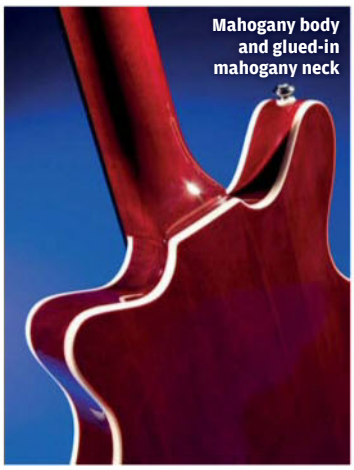
BRIAN MAY Bass

Even if the inescapable Queen association doesn't appeal to you, the Brian May Bass is still a refreshing '60s-inspired medium-scale instrument. Review by **Gareth Morgan**

If there's one piece of trivia about Brian May (other than that he plays guitar in Queen and is married to Anita Dobson of *Eastenders* fame) that everybody on earth is likely to know, it has to be that he built his own guitar... well, to be precise, he built it with his dad, partly to save money, and partly just for the challenge. May designed it himself using the best parts he could fashion or recycle, and ended up with a guitar with individual looks and a very distinctive sound. From 1975 he had replicas made, originally by the luthier John Birch, mainly as spares but sometimes for specific recordings or shows.

There have been copies of Brian's guitar down the years. Guild released 300 in 1984, though they were solid instead of semi-hollow and had DiMarzios in place of Burns Tri-Sonics; the re-established Burns concern then made a decent effort; and then, in 2004, at the instigation of Barry Moorhouse of House Music and with May's long-time tech Pete Malandrone onboard, Brian May Guitars was established, to make an affordable replica with May himself being fully involved.

Adding a bass to the BMG roster was inspired by luthier Andrew Guyton, the man May has turned to for replicas since 2003. Guyton gave up trying to persuade BMG that it was a good idea and just went ahead and made one anyway. They obviously liked it because the model we have for review is the budget-priced, Korean-made version of Guyton's prototype.



Mahogany body and glued-in mahogany neck

Lightweight open-gear tuners on an arrow-shaped headstock

The 31.5" scale is an interesting choice between a Fender 34" and the 30" typical of Danelectro and Gibson

For amateur luthiers Brian May and his father managed to design a very fresh-looking instrument, with a near-circular body plus horns that have faint echoes of Grimshaw. The BM Bass is a fairly close replica of the original Red Special, but with greater mass. The body is mahogany, and the strings are front-loaded. There's only one finish available and of course it has to be the same classic cherry overcoat which adorned May's own instrument. It's expertly applied and allows plenty of grain patterning to show through, complementing the overall look.

Cream binding frames both top and bottom edges; there's no ribcage or forearm chamfer but as the bass is a couple of millimetres thinner than standard girth, this doesn't really damage the playing comfort too badly. As the body design puts the waist so close to the neck, it'll take time and a little adjustment to get comfortable... or you can just wear a strap, which solves the problem nicely.

The mahogany neck is secured to the body in a Gibson style, using the using the set-in method, and the scale length is worth noting straight away: it's 800mm/31.5", an interesting choice between a long 34" Fender scale and the 30" favoured by Danelectros and short-scale Gibson basses. This makes it perfect for guitarists looking to double on something that feels close to ➔

FACTFILE
Brian May Bass

DESCRIPTION **Solidbody bass. Made in Korea**
PRICE **£715, padded gig bag included**

BUILD **Mahogany body, set in mahogany neck with 20 medium-gauge nickel frets on an ebony fingerboard. Hipshot tuners and BM Vintage Style bridge. Chrome hardware**

ELECTRICS **Passive with one BMB Humbucker and one BMB Single Coil pickup. Two volumes and one tone control**
LEFT-HANDERS **No**
FINISH **Antique cherry**
RANGE OPTIONS **None**

SCALE LENGTH
800mm/30.5"
NECK WIDTH
Nut 45mm
12th fret 52mm
DEPTH OF NECK
First fret 22mm
12th fret 25mm
STRING SPACING
Nut 11.5mm
Bridge 18mm
ACTION AS SUPPLIED
12th fret treble 3mm
12th fret bass 3mm
WEIGHT
3.57kg/7.85lbs

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Gretsch
Electromatic Junior Jet Bass II
Based on the single-cutaway Duo Jet guitar design with a single mid-placed pickup and a short-scale neck
RRP **£287**

With no pickup selector, you'll be balancing that humbucker with the volume controls

Despite the odd way it sits on your lap and the neck pickup's lack of definition, the BMB is great fun to whizz around on

their main instrument, or for beginners, or the shorter in stature.

While not super-slim or fast the cherry-finished neck isn't at all bulky, and it's comfortable and highly playable. Naturally, it culminates in a headstock with the arrowhead form familiar to Queen fans worldwide. A set of high-quality open-geared chrome Hipshot tuners line up two abreast, separated only by May's signature. As well as a black synthetic nut there's a zero fret in residence which should help minimise the difference between open string and fretted note.

The fretboard is ebony and carries 20 medium-gauge nickel frets with white pearloid dot markers, with two at frets five and 19 and three at the octave, an adornment that matches the BM Bass to the RS (though May's guitar has 24 frets and a further set of three dots at the second octave). A further set of markers line the top edge, all white dots except for thin block inlays at frets five and 17, a quirky detail that no one has a reason for... but we really like that kind of silliness at *Guitar & Bass*.

The bridge, a chrome BMB Vintage Hi Mass unit, is a chunkier version of Leo Fender's basic design. Passive electronics are the order of the day, and the BMB is kitted out with a humbucker in the neck position and one BMB Single Coil at the bridge, both with shiny chrome covers. If the colour of this bass didn't put you in mind of Jack Bruce's Cream-era Gibson EB-3, the pickups and their positioning certainly should. As it's passive, the controls are simple, with two volumes and one tone dial of the standard more-or-less treble variety, so getting a sound is easy-peasy.

Sounds

The basic sound (both pickups on with the tone knob at full) is excellent: nice and fat with growling lows and an overall feeling of controlled aggression. There's a hint of zing at the G string but elsewhere the clarity is more even and more natural, and the midrange is generally solid with a punchiness cloaked in a darker hue. Highs are clean and clear; they're slightly choked in the P-Bass manner but you have to work pretty hard to induce finger or fret-noise. It all amounts to a pretty good, stylistically versatile starting point.

Cutting back the tone control has an interesting effect: at about three quarters cut you get the expected silkier version of the basic sound, but before this, the reduced trebles allow a little more high-mid to poke through, so the thinner strings get fractionally snappier and more brittle until the final metamorphosis. Soloing the bridge pickup uncorks a surprisingly lively option with a pleasing throatiness lurking beneath a tighter, brighter tone. You get only a slight hint of the nasal zing in higher registers, the D and G strings veering more in the direction of bright and cutting. The lows are tight and plenty wide enough for high-intensity finger-funk forays. Roll back the tone knob and the BMB's bridge pickup starts to sound the way you expected all along: all the rat-a-tat attack is there, but it's not quite fat enough... you lose high-end attack and lower midrange-induced body.

There's another surprise in store from the neck pickup, as it's not quite as good as we would have liked; we would have appreciated an earthy, Gibsonesque sound with dark mids and slightly choked highs, but here we get a smooth, woolly rumble without too much definition. The only possible applications, other than filling space on a dance music gig through a trillion-watt PA with massive bass bins, would be roots music or old-school blues – there's just about enough attack to work for those. The only useful blend we could find involves dialling the bridge pickup back to about 80 per cent, a move which reclaims some clarity and which works well for a dubby, reggae-flavoured thump.

Verdict

In truth, the fairest way the judge the BMB is not on where it has come from, but on how good it actually is as a bass. Ignoring the lineage of the shape, it's an unusual and fine-looking beast with a heap of '60s flavour which harks back to wilder times without really trying to. Tonally, it's fairly solid and dependable stuff with just a bit more top end than you'd expect given where the pickups are sited. You do pay for this in the quality of the neck pickup sound, but this – and the slightly strange way in which the BMB sits on your lap – are the only real issues. For fans of full-scale basses the scale length might feel a bit cramped but, to be honest, we found it highly playable and great fun to whizz around on. The price is near the upper reaches of what you'd call 'budget' but if you're a guitarist looking to double on bass or a bassist looking to make things a bit smaller, it's well worth a go.

The BMB comes with a zero fret and a black plastic string guide

Simple but beefy bridge and great-looking control knobs

FINAL SCORE	
BRIAN MAY BASS	
Build Quality	**17**/20
Playability	**16**/20
Sound	**16**/20
Value for money	**16**/20
Vibe	**17**/20
TOTAL	**82%**

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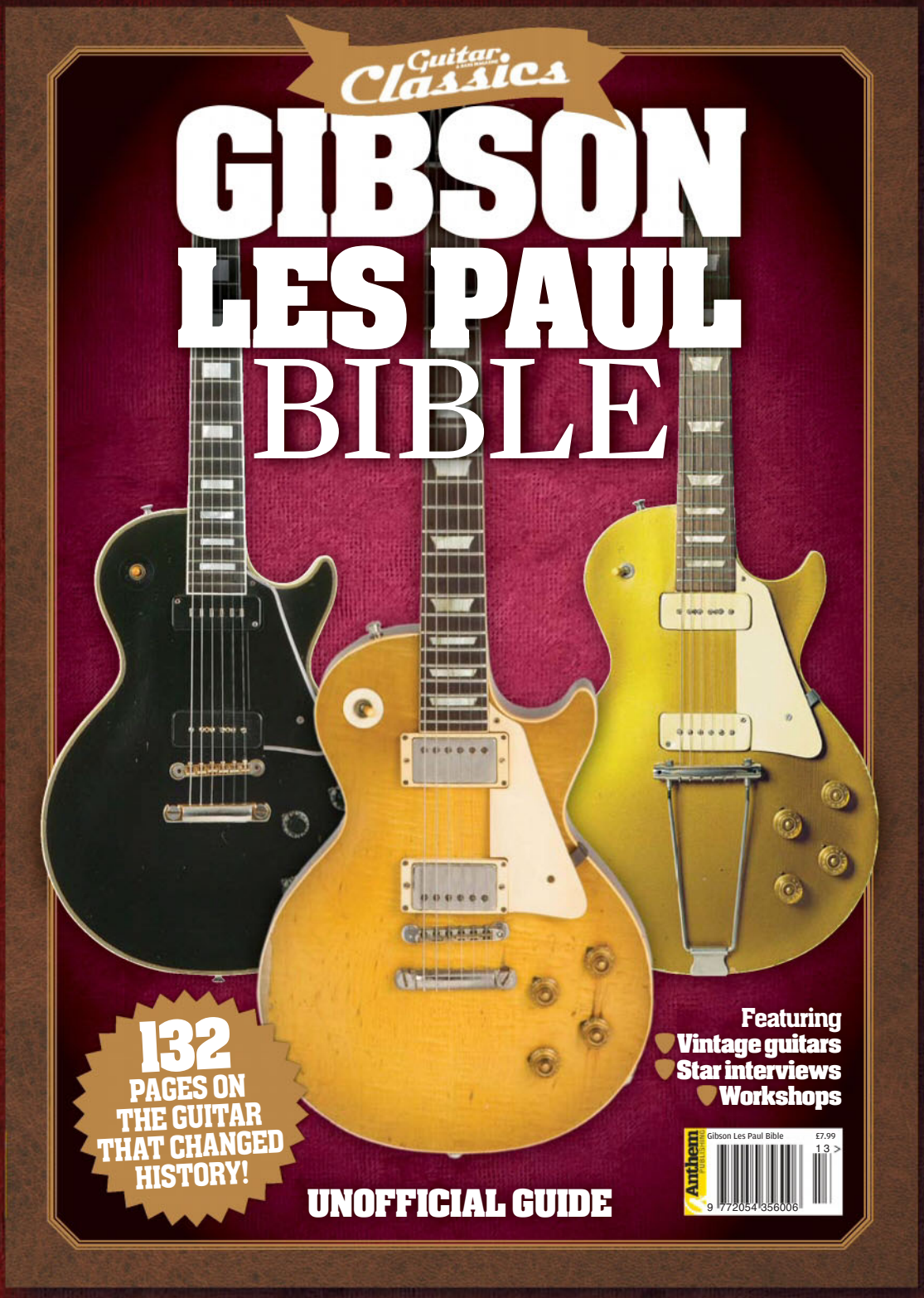

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HOOKED ON CLASSICS

RACING THOROUGHBREDS

The sighting of one famous-name vintage Les Paul is rare enough – so what does it feel like to see four? It was up to **Phil Harris** to hold not just the plectrum but also the microphone

When you've been around as long as I have, completely new experiences that knock your socks off don't come around very often, but I certainly had one at the North West Guitar Show back in May, when I had the true pleasure and privilege of appearing with an all-star cast of vintage Les Pauls. To give you a bit of background: Peter Hoarty, the show's organiser, got in touch with me a few months previously. Peter knew I had possession of the Peter Green/Gary Moore Gibson Les Paul, and asked whether I was willing to come up to Haydock Park with it and talk about its history.

Now I haven't been all that big on guitar shows in recent years, but I knew from all the emails and conversations I've had since my feature on the Greeny guitar in August 2013 just how well-loved that guitar is. I knew that I wasn't going to have the guitar for much longer – in fact, the guitar is no longer in my possession as you read this – as it was going back to the States.

Knowing this, I couldn't in all good conscience deny people the opportunity to see it in the UK for what might be the last time. So I kindly accepted Peter's offer, and then started thinking about what I'd actually do.

It'll come as no surprise to anyone – whether you've met me or not – that I often get accused of talking the hind legs of a donkey, but I'm no Bruce Forsyth. It quickly became obvious that, as a former pro player, the best way to show off just how special the Greeny guitar is was by playing it. Having

Paul Kossoff's first-ever Les Paul, a 1955 Custom which he used when he was just a teenager

A scarce sighting of a Les Paul particularly iconic to guitar fans in the UK – Keith Richards's '59 sunburst

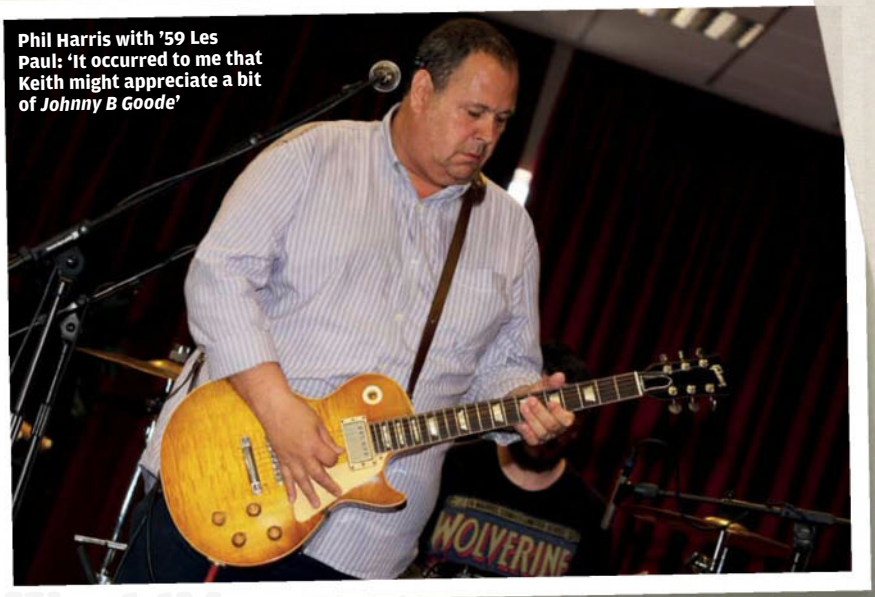
talked to Peter, he arranged for Phil and Danny Cashen from Roger's Floyd to accompany me on bass and drums for a few numbers to show the guitar off.

It was at this point that I started getting really nervous. I haven't really played in public for the last 10 years, and I'm not a veteran of the after-dinner speaker circuit. I was scared that I'd end up this mumbling, bumbling idiot in front of all the people who'd taken the time to turn up. It didn't help that Peter put me on the flyers for the event; it's great when you're young, slim and good-looking, but less great when you look like I do now.

One of the things that set me straight was the realisation that they weren't there to see me, they were there to see the Peter Green guitar. I told myself that anybody who turned up would be the same as me – someone passionate about the guitar and the music it helped make – so as long as I got the magic of the instrument across, I'd be fine.

So I duly turned up at the morning of the show at Haydock Park, and Peter led me through to where I was playing. I could already see from the venue and the wide ↦

'I told myself that anybody who turned up would be the same as me, so as long as I got the magic of the instrument across, I'd be fine'



Phil Harris with '59 Les Paul: 'It occurred to me that Keith might appreciate a bit of *Johnny B Goode*'

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The unmistakable Peter Green/Gary Moore Les Paul in all its battered glory

Phil with the sunburst used by Paul Kossoff in his latter years

'Arthur Ramm owns Paul Kossoff's '59 burst. It's a wonderful guitar, and its history makes it an iconic and special instrument'

nature of the stands that Peter was putting on a great show. I had to laugh when Peter informed me that I had a room backstage with a security guard: I come from an era where you got changed in the toilets, if you were lucky. Although I played some big gigs in my time, I was never the star of the show so wasn't used to this kind of treatment. The adrenalin kicked in even more as I looked out as Peter introduced me to see the room was packed. Once I got out there I knew straightaway that it doesn't get much better than this – and it was all thanks to the Peter Green guitar.

Some guitars, especially when you use distortion and overdrive, can make you feel as if you are just triggering notes than having a real emotional experience. Not the Peter Green guitar. It's almost clairvoyant, the way it can express everything in your soul. I know I sound a bit high-falutin', but – even though I'd had the guitar for ages and knew all about its history and its construction – it wasn't until I played it on stage as we ran through tracks such as *Need Your Love So Bad* did I really appreciate how magical it is.

There was also a show and tell of many original Gibson PAFs

The Green/Moore guitar would have been enough for me on its own, but the fun didn't stop there. When I originally talked to Peter, I thought it would be great to get another famous sunburst Les Paul out there. So I phoned my friend John Buckton – or 'Johnny Kossoff', as I call him – who plays guitar in Freeway, the best Free tribute band. They're so good, and John does such a job of recreating that Kossoff sound, that they've supported Free's Simon Kirk – in fact, Simon's even played with them on occasion. John's good friends with Arthur Ramm, who owns the '59 burst Paul Kossoff had in the later part of his career. Arthur played in Beckett, who supported Free, and he became great friends with Kossoff. Arthur's a lovely fella, and when John asked whether he'd make the Les Paul available for the show ↦

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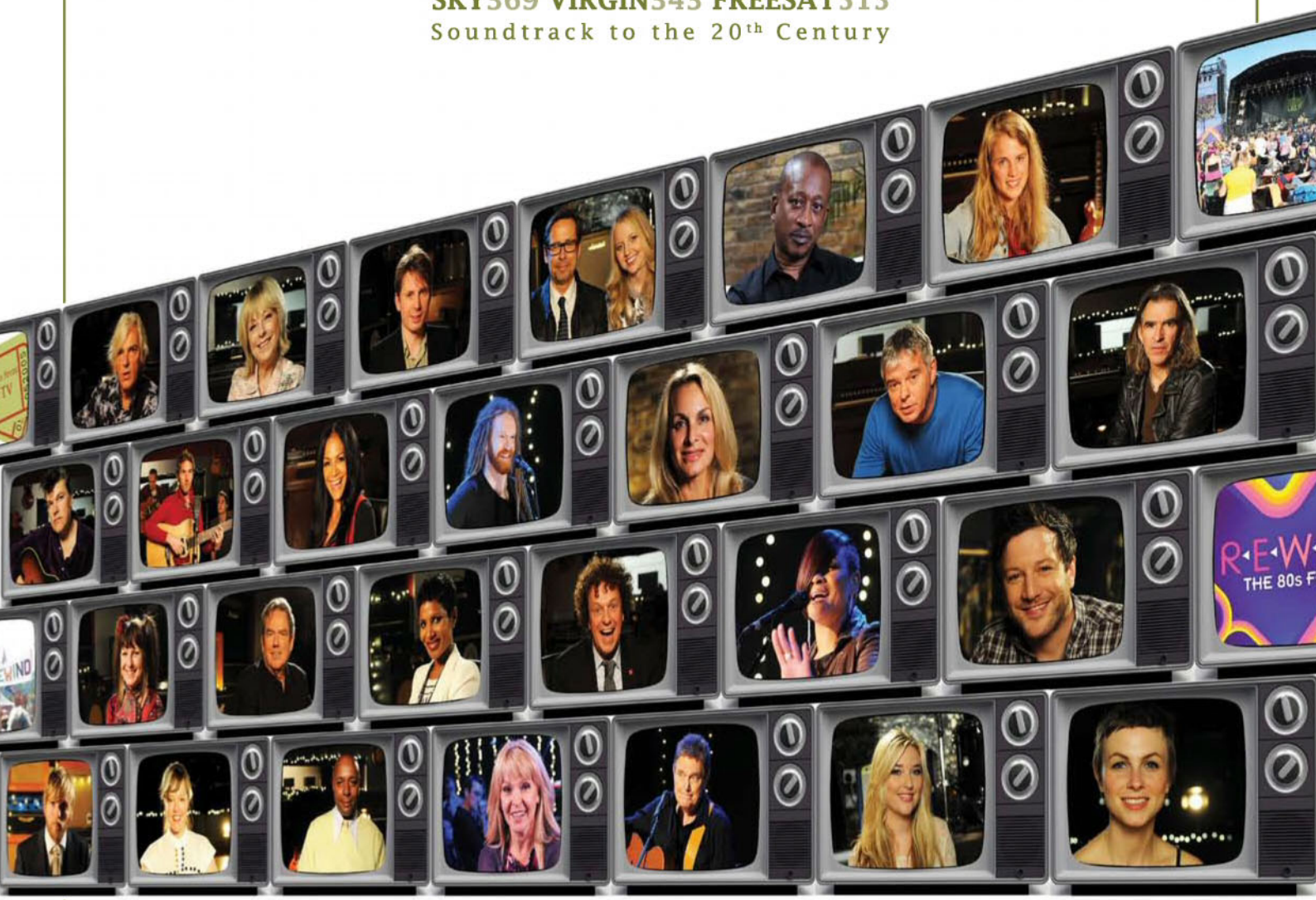

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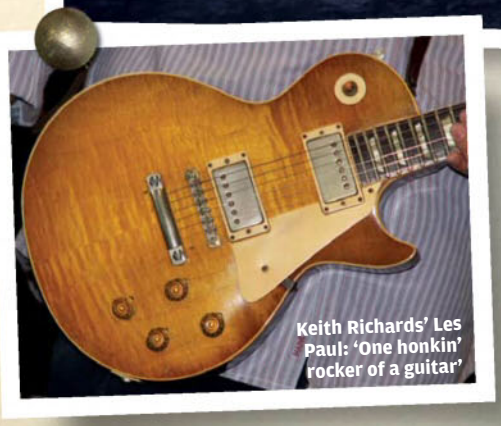
Peter Hoarty, director of Northern Guitar Shows, grabbed the chance of a souvenir photo too



Keith Richards' Les Paul: 'One honkin' rocker of a guitar'

'While I was doing my talk, someone came out and placed another Les Paul on the stand. It was Keith Richards' '59. My face was a picture'

he was happy to help. It's a wonderful guitar, and the Kossoff connection and history makes it an iconic and special instrument. I also decided to bring the 1955 Gibson Les Paul Custom that Paul played when he was teenager, to have his first Les Paul and his last Les Paul together. The Custom wasn't played, but it was wonderful to pay tribute to Paul Kossoff and the guitars in such a fashion.

While I was doing my talk, there was a bit of movement backstage and someone came out and placed another Gibson Les Paul on the stand. Said guitar turns out to Keith Richards' 1959 Gibson Les Paul Sunburst, as used on *Exile On Main Street* and *Get Your Ya's Ya's Out*. I'm reliably informed that my face was an absolute picture when the guitar appeared – and so it flippin' should have been. For all the famous guitar players who've played '59 Les Paul sunbursts over the years, for many in England, Keith was the fi familiar with the guitar, and indeed at one point owned Mick Taylor's '59, but to have that guitar appear out of nowhere – well, it didn't exactly appear out of nowhere, and I've got the guitar's owner, Simon, to thank – was a true shock to the system.

The only thing was, we hadn't rehearsed anything to play with it. My mind went into warp speed in a bid to think of something that would do this guitar justice, and it occurred to me that Keith, being a huge Chuck Berry fan, might appreciate a bit of *Johnny B Goode*. It also meant something personally, as it's always the song if I get up anywhere that I play for my wife, Sue, who couldn't be there on the day as she was at home with my son and his wife, who was expecting our latest grandchild to be born any minute (my first granddaughter, Scarlett, was born a few days later safe and sound).

I can vouch for the Keith Richards Les Paul as being one honkin' rocker of a guitar. Simon has left the guitar as he bought it, so it isn't the easiest to play, but it's the business – and it was another highlight of the day.

After I'd finished, Peter Hoarty had a great idea to line the guitars up and allow people to be photographed with them, with all the £5 donations going to the Alder Hey Children's Hospital. It was great seeing people queue round the block – knowing that there are so many people as passionate about the guitars, the players and the music as I am makes me smile even now. And to have such iconic guitars side by side doesn't happen very often.

For me, it was a wonderful, humbling experience that will live with me forever. Many thanks to Peter and everyone connected to the North West Guitar Show, Paul and Danny for the musical support, John, Arthur and Simon – and the owner of the Peter Green Les Paul – for their generosity in making such a special day happen. And a million thanks for everyone who came along. I hope you enjoyed it as much as I did.

For more info on Northern Guitar Shows go to www.guitarshows.co.uk

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Do The LOCOMOTION

Nigel Barker came through a life-changing accident to reclaim the use of his injured hand and start a brand new musical life playing gigs and recording his own albums – and accumulating a selection of guitars with a nutty twist. Interview by Lars Mullen

For any musician, losing dexterity would be a nightmare scenario. It happened to Nigel Barker, who lost the use of his left hand after a near-fatal accident in the early '80s. Aged just 23, he already felt his musical career was over. 'It would be great if we always knew what the future held, but you don't know what's around the corner,' says Nigel today. 'For some, it can be an interesting twist of fate. I would never in a million years have dreamt I would now be playing guitar once more, and in a band – let alone launching a new album this summer.'

At the time of his calamity Nigel was employed as an assistant engineer at AIR Studios in London, one of the biggest recording facilities in Europe, working on sessions for artists such as Tears For Fears, Japan and Elton John. Before taking this job he had been busily gigging with his Les Paul Deluxe, and also gaining experience working at a studio in London's Old Kent Road, where local bands like Dire Straits and Squeeze would record their early material.

'As a reward for working non-stop for nearly 18 months, AIR Studios sent me out to the studios in Montserrat in the West Indies, which turned out to be a memorable experience in more ways than one,' Nigel recalls. 'One day I was driving back from a beach bar in a Mini-Moke, which is a typical form of transport for the islands – but with small wheels and low ground clearance, it's not the best off-road vehicle.

'Montserrat is a volcanic island, so there are lots of potholes and hairpin bends. The front wheels got caught up in a rain gully, I didn't make the bend in the road, and went straight over the edge and ended upside-down in a mango tree. Much later I was luckily found by a passing off-duty policeman, who saw the headlights up in the tree. I came round in the morning to see my producer John Punter helping to give me a blood transfusion!

'At the time it seemed like a fairly minor injury to my left hand, so I spent the rest of the time at Montserrat sitting by the pool with my arm in the air. I was really miffed that I couldn't stay on, as the Police were scheduled to arrive on the island to record their next album, *Synchronicity*, and I wanted to work on it. But when I got back to the UK I went to hospital, as I felt something was wrong. They told me it was bad. Gangrene had set in.

'I had several operations over the next 18 months, including procedures to insert false tendons into the back of my hand. Unfortunately at the time this was pretty new technology, and the tendons they put in turned out to be too short. My hand didn't recover properly... it was basically a paddle that I couldn't do much with.

'So it seemed that any guitar-playing was gone for the foreseeable future. I sold the Les Paul Deluxe and started working in TV as a sound engineer, and then I became a screenwriter, director and film editor. I missed that Les Paul... but there was no point in buying another, and for 30 years I didn't take much notice of any particular genre of music, or make any real attempt to play guitar.

'However, I'd been riding my Harley for much of this period, and working the heavy clutch seemed to be just as good as any

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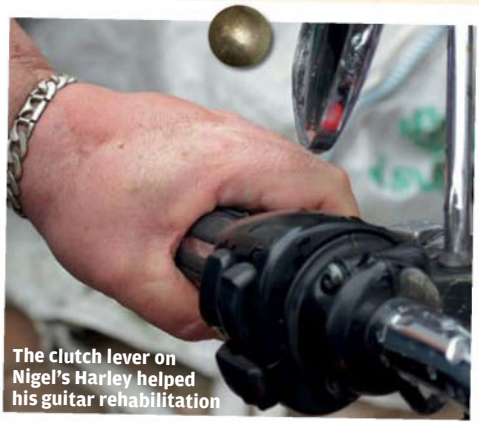
The clutch lever on Nigel's Harley helped his guitar rehabilitation

Emotional connection: the first post-accident guitar, a Les Paul Standard R8

th rapy I was having on my hand. I had an acoustic guitar that lived behind the sofa, but I would get really frustrated that my hand wouldn't respond when I tried to form basic chord shapes. I did try, though, for years and years, until one day I suddenly found I could play open C, then a barre F. I persevered, and slowly some limited dexterity started to come back... and I began to wonder if there was any way I could play electric again.

'So I was suddenly all fired up with new vigour and enthusiasm, and I went across town to Macari's in London's Charing Cross Road and asked if I could please just hold the Les Paul Standard that was in the window. I chose the Standard as that was the one I originally wanted, instead of the Deluxe. I was a little nervous, to say the least, as it had been a long time. It was so weird, but it felt like a pat on the back from above. I fumbled about and it was all a bit crude and I didn't have a party piece that I could play in a shop full of people, but I just couldn't put that guitar down. I told them that I had to have it – but I didn't have the £2700 asking price.

'I decided to start two tribute acts to ZZ Top and Seasick Steve. It was a blues-rock education... and in no time, I had a guitar collection'

Replica of Billy Gibbons' Super Model guitar complete with half-smoked Lucky Strike

'The guy at Macari's was great, though, and he said he'd keep the Les Paul back for me if I just went in every now and again and paid £250 a time. I even wrote down the serial number, as I insisted it had to be that very same guitar!

'After a couple of weeks I called him up to say I was on the way with the credit card. That day I was editing a film in Soho, and during the lunch break, as I strolled towards Charing Cross Road, the church bells started ringing to the same rhythm as my boots on the pavement. It was really quite emotional! I thought there must be something special happening – could this be a celebration of me buying this guitar and reinstating my playing? The bells seemed to speed up, and much to the amusement of people queuing for buses I was now literally skipping on the way to the shop where I bought the Les Paul!

'And here's that very guitar – a 2011 Gibson Les Paul R8 VOS, based on the spec of an original '58. It's factory relic'd, but not too much, with a mahogany body and a carved maple top, with an original-style ABR-1 Tun-O-Matic.

'I was soon having marathon 18-hour practice sessions, and as the Les Paul was set up with a really low action I soon got to grips with playing blues licks on the huge C profile neck. It has the typical Les Paul stadium rock sound through my 50W Marshall DSL, but as the Les Paul was originally a jazz guitar it can also do that, with a lovely warmth from the neck pickup into a clean amp.

'As I was getting on so well it seemed natural to form a band, so I decided to start a couple of tribute acts. I chose to cover ZZ Top and Seasick Steve because they both had gritty blues as a common denominator. It turned out to be a whole new blues-rock education – and in no time, I discovered that I somehow had a guitar collection!'

Nigel dived into his tribute bands with typical energy. 'I'd always loved Billy Gibbons' playing style, although I can't get on with his .008 gauge strings – he's a delicate player, but it's like playing elastic bands.

'As for the look, I had a small beard already, but went to my local hairdressers and explained what I needed, and they said the best thing was to have extensions. For two years I went to work with the extensions rolled up and unfurled them for gigs – but it's all real hair now!

'I do love the Seymour Duncan Pearly Gates humbucker, and for the ZZ Top act – which we called El Loco Plays ZZ Top – I installed one of those into a replica ➔

'The only real problem I had in El Loco Plays ZZ Top was wearing those damn sunglasses. I couldn't see a thing'

of the custom guitar built for him by John Bolin called the Super Model, complete with the legendary Lucky Strike cigarette in the neck pickup cavity with two puffs taken out of it, just like the original. It's really got the real Billy Gibbons sound. The pinky on my left hand still barely moves, but I managed to get the whole El Loco Plays ZZ Top set pretty note-perfect. The only problem I had was wearing those damn sunglasses... I couldn't see a thing.

'I had the Super Model built with a left-handed neck, like the real thing. All the work was done by a London-based luthier called Will Russell, and I also asked him to fit an on/off switch for the humbucker. It honestly couldn't be more basic... it's a real just-get-on-with-it guitar. Mind you, it isn't enough to just call Will my "guitar tech" – he's really one of the finest electric and acoustic luthiers I know. Not only has he built several of my guitars, but he's also adapted some of the simpler, more eccentric ones into really great, good-sounding, practical working instruments.

'With El Loco underway and now getting to grips with these guitars, I also found the time to get my writing back on track. Having worked in some of the best studios I knew some tricks which could help me get good results using Logic and Garageband on my Mac. For my first album I had 10 songs lined up, and to keep the iron hot I set myself a challenge to complete the whole thing, from recording to the final production, in just 48 hours.

Gretsch Bo Diddley, now with three strings, and a Gretsch Bo Junior

'I had the sound I wanted but I was stuck for a name for this new project until I saw the American guitarist Buckethead, who famously wears a KFC bucket on his head. I thought, well, I'm always wearing a hat... so I called my project Cowboy Hat And That Fuzzbox Voodoo. The latest album is called *A History Of The American West And Other Stories*, and it's a combination of Americana and blues-rock, full of kick-ass overdriven guitars, all themed around some of the tales, legends and lies that make up American history.

'I was recently asked who my three favourite songwriters are and I just said "Jack White" three times. Jack is God, but I don't really sound anything like him. The closest I've got is probably on the song *Daniel Boone And Pioneers Of The Wilderness*.

'As well as using the Will Russell guitar on the album I also brought out my gold sparkle Gretsch Electromatic, which I believe is from the Jet Series. This was a very inexpensive eBay buy, and it's kept in open E for slide. It's got great sustain, this one, and no wonder... it must weigh about twice as much as a Les Paul. I asked Will Russell to breathe on it, as I do with all my guitars. He fitted a new spring to the Bigsby and now it works a treat, returning to pitch every time.

Goldtop Gretsch Electromatic with Bigsby vibrato

'I have four guitars which are left over from El Loco and the Seasick Steve act – which, incidentally, was called Carsick Nigel. These guitars are far from redundant... they're still essential studio guitars for me.

'First is a pair of Gretsch Bo Diddley models. The larger one has Gretsch's own Special Design humbuckers and just three strings; it was won in a raffle by my wife Melanie. The smaller Bo Diddley Junior is a backup guitar. Both were used for Carsick Nigel, played through a Roland Cube amp. They're wonderful for slide.

'The next two are a Dean Metalman bass, which I bought for El Loco's bass player to use as he was broke at the time, and an Epiphone Explorer with a Pearly Gates pickup at the bridge. Unlike the bass, the Epiphone still has its sheepskin covering in the style of '80s ZZ Top – it's actually a coat which I bought from Shepherd's Bush market! For full authenticity when playing the song *Legs*, this guitar and ➔

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Dean Metalman bass used in the El Loco ZZ Top tribute band

Epiphone Explorer with home-tailored sheepskin coat

the Dean bass were fitted with guitar-spinning mechanisms that we built from cake dishes and straplocks. There's a certain amount of concentration, poise and accuracy required to perform this movement on stage under dimmed lights. We nearly knocked our brains out on more than one occasion, but it really worked. You can see us do it on YouTube!

'Here's another favourite, based around a Gibson Firebird but with a reverse Tele-style neck. I had Will Russell build the body and fit a single Pearly Gates humbucker and a Schaller Floyd Rose, which has turned out to be very useful for the heavy whammy work I do in Cowboy Hat And That Fuzzbox Voodoo. This is a great all-rounder ... the versatility is a bit limited, but that's single-pickup guitars for you.

'I love the Firebird shape, and I know that a lot of players of a certain age will recall Roxy Music's Phil Manzanera on *Top Of The Pops* with his fantastic red three-pickup model back in the '70s. This one is perfect for me, and in homage to Jack White I've put in three stutter buttons for creating outlandish machine-gun type feedback effects.

'For authenticity when playing ZZ Top's Legs, the Dean bass and the Epiphone Explorer had a spinning mechanism we built from a cake dish'

'It's probably apparent by now that I'm a huge fan of humbuckers, but having never owned a Strat and having been constantly told how good they were for 30 years without being able to try one, I found myself this white US Standard Strat. After the thicker-sounding guitars I'd been used to, I've realised that this has got to be the most versatile guitar I own. This was another good eBay purchase and it's now taking the lead role in the Cowboy Hat project, although I'm helping it along with various boosters in the chain to beef up the sound a little bit. I've also cheered it up with some stickers... including a million-dollar bill.'

Will Russell custom with Firebird-style body and reverse headstock (left)

Nigel loves acoustics as much as electrics, and he's got a few. 'This little Washburn R320SWRK is from their Vintage Series. They've done a good job of echoing the original Washburn parlour models from the late 19th and early 20th century with aged parts and delicate wear on the wood, but as they're built using modern technology, they're a little bit stronger than they look. This one records really well, and it's got a Seymour Duncan Woody pickup fitted in the soundhole.

'I always seem to get inspiration for writing during the night, and I ↦

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Much-gigged Fender US Standard Strat with added stickers

Two parlours: a Washburn reissue and an unknown vintage model

Gallotone f-holr guitar with added pickup and a Fender five-string banjo

often sit bolt upright and grab this little nylon-strung parlour guitar. I couldn't tell you where it was made... it could be Spanish, or even German. It's pretty old, and it was a great deal at £80. It's light and dead easy to play, and always kept beside the bed. It's like a nightcap – after a few strums, I'm gone!

'For the Carsick Nigel gigs, the Washburn knocked my little '50s South African-built Gallotone Wonder acoustic into second place. I bought the Gallotone because I thought it looked garishly beautiful in red and yellow. John Lennon used a Gallotone Champion in the Quarrymen, although that one didn't have f-holes. I believe it sold for about £155,000 in the late '90s... maybe I should hang onto it. I used this on the album on a track called *The Cherokee Trail Of Tears*. I fitted a mini floating pickup at the neck, which works really well. The action is a little high, but it's ideal for that early bluesy sound. It's also great for slide, although the frets are raised with square edges so I have to be accurate with the bar – or it sounds like someone's knocking at the door.'

Nigel also has further goals concerning his manual mobility. 'I've obtained this Fender five-string banjo – I do love the sound of a banjo – and a Mahalo ukulele, as they're both a real challenge for my hand. Another thing I'm working on playing at the moment is this Clearwater electric mandolin... they call a Mandocaster. It's good for that little sprinkling of icing on the cake on some of the songs I'm recording right now for the next album, which will be called *American Cities*.

'I also have two electro-acoustics that I keep in the studio most of the time – a jumbo-bodied Countryman, which is a cool guitar for a ridiculously low price, and a wonderful Simon & Patrick from the Songsmith series. This was one of the first acoustics I bought when this all kicked off again. It's a fantastic guitar and it records just as well it sounds on stage, with a nice, balanced, sweet, mellow sound.

'I have a travel bass guitar, a fretless Ministar Basstar Pro F which is described by the company as having "unrivalled portability", which I think must be correct – after all, it's really just a long piece of wood. I play it as conventionally as possible rather than making the most of it being fretless, but the opportunity is there if needed. I haven't travelled with it, but it's come in very useful in the studio as it's got a really deep, thuddy sound. I also have the "stand up kit", so it can be played as an upright bass as well.

'I recently bought a black active Hohner headless G3T guitar simply because I'd ↔

Mahalo uke and a Clearwater electric mandocaster

'The Gallotone Wonder looks beautiful in red and yellow. John Lennon's sold for £155,000 – maybe I should hang onto it'

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Two acoustics – a Simon & Patrick and a Countryman jumbo

Ministar Bass F and a Hohner G3T

Close-up of the Ministar Bass F

Hub cap and broomstick guitar and a Fat Walrus cigar box guitar

fancied one in my early days as an eccentric-looking alternative to that first Les Paul Deluxe I had. I've since realised how very '80s it is... which isn't all that bad. I've replaced the humbucker with a Pearly Gates. The separate on/off pickup toggle switches offer some neat options, but I tend to just use the humbucker on its own. It's now employed as a baritone guitar, with heavy strings and tuned down to C. It works well for really thick, meaty overdrive. In a good way, it sounds bad.'

Seasick Steve is of course renowned for his basic, primitive guitars with very few strings, so for his Carsick project Nigel inevitably needed to follow suit. 'This four-string Fat Walrus cigar box guitar was built by the Muddy Bog Holding Company,' he explains. 'The bridge pickup wasn't that good, so I added a P90 onto the lid by the bridge, and boy, does it rock now!

'You can come up with riffs on a three-string or four-string guitar that are so different to a regular six-string model. For me it's like taking the extraneous strings out of the equation, and the simplicity is a real virtue for inspiration and songwriting.

'There's primitive, and then there's really primitive... as with my Hub Cap four-stringer. I like the fact that the nut is a real nut and bolt! The drawing pin position markers on the broom handle are in fact pretty accurate, but unless I can somehow keep the broom rigid, tuning stability is always going to be a bit of a problem. Still, through an angry amp, it howls like a good 'un.'

The strings are growing fewer and fewer, and Nigel finishes by producing with a flourish a one-string wonder. 'Over the last few years I've gone to Will with some crazy ideas and guitar parts, but when I arrived with a four-by-two, a Maglite torch and a window winder from a '57 Chevrolet, one baritone string and a Tele pickup and said "make it work", his face was a picture,' he grins. 'It's an approximate replica of Seasick Steve's one-string guitar, the one he calls a "diddley bow", like the one you can see in his *Live At Reading* video from 2008. The car window winder is only a mock vibrato, although Steve's own one is not as vintage... mine is a real '75 winder.'

And has Nigel got enough guitars by now? 'Well, my wife has asked me to stop buying them, and I must admit the ones I have now add up to a pretty good collection... not just in terms of eye-candy, but in terms of what they can do. There's always the wish list, of course... but I must admit that any more right now would be superfluous to requirements!'

For information and videos of Nigel's Cowboy Hat And That Fuzzbox Voodoo project, head over to www.cowboyhat.tv

'I've gone to Will Russell with some crazy ideas but when I arrived with a four-by-two, a Maglite torch and one string, his face was a picture'

A tribute to Seasick Steve's diddley bow

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Out Of Africa

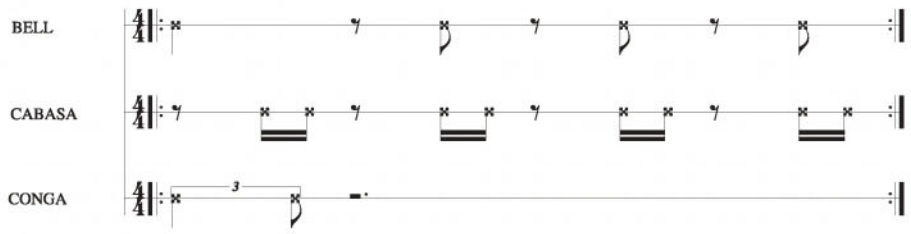
African Palm Wine-style guitar is complex, addictive and intoxicating. Fire up your drum machine and prepare to make some great summertime music

It is hardly surprising that guitar players such as Ry Cooder and Paul Simon, to name but two, have chosen to collaborate with African musicians. Africa possesses the largest menu of both traditional and urban grooves in the world, a potential source of inspiration for anyone needing to resuscitate their depleting creative energy. We're going to explore two 'Palm Wine' guitar grooves; the Sikyi (pronounced see-chi), and the Amponsah (arm-pawn-sa). Why is it called 'palm wine'?. Well, there was a time when no palm wine drinking session was complete without acoustic guitar music; hence the label.

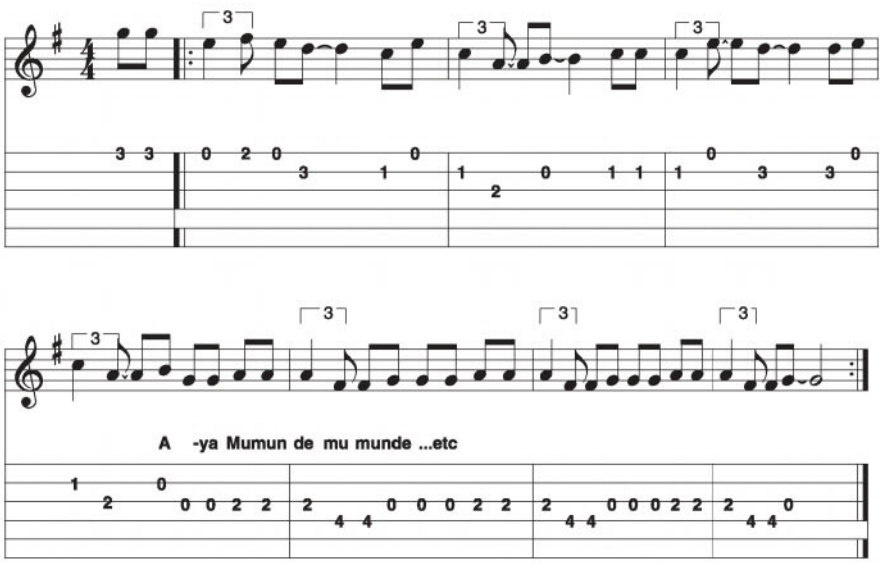
1 SIKYI HEARTBEAT

The heartbeat of Sikyi and most African music is to be found in the drum section. For practical reasons, we will use a drum machine to recreate that feel.

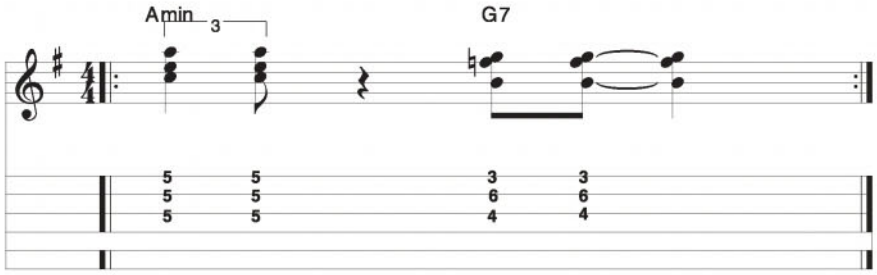
Exercise 1 is a simple, three-part rhythm you can set up to accompany yourself with. Otherwise, you could play the bell rhythm with a coin on an empty bottle, as is done in west Africa. Once you have programmed it in (a cabasa is a shaker, incidentally) try to feel the rhythm so that you hear the pattern of the bell, and not the four-beat pulse of the time signature. It's a pattern that is similar to the 'chop' rhythm of reggae but without the first beat of the eighth-note. Rhythmical independence is crucial to all African music; some forms have no time signature at all, being made up of a polyrhythmic structure whereby, for example, signatures of 2/4, 4/4 and 6/8 will coexist in a staggered bar system. This makes them completely unintelligible to the uninitiated.



2 MUMUNDE 4/4 TIME

This is as direct a translation of the folk tune we're going to look at, *Mumunde* (pronounced Mom-moo-dey) as I can manage. Exercise 2 is the melody; the chorus repeating three times from bar 4 onwards. Play it with a happy feeling and record it, along with the drum pattern you've programmed, four or five times. We'll use this as the backing to practice our other exercises to. Listen to it over and over again until you really get the feel for it.

3 MORE RHYTHM — 4/4 TIME

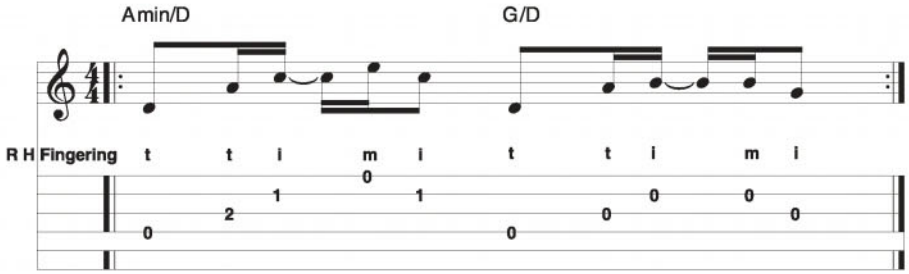
Exercise 3 is simply a rhythmic strum. Even though it is based on two chords, the note and inversion choice is important to retain the flavour of Sikyi. Play the Am with a crisp and tight plectrum action, and the G7 a little looser. Play this at 115-120 bpm.



4 AN EXPLOSION OF HAPPINESS — 4/4 TIME

You may find that when you play Exercise 4, you will start to feel the African vibe coming through – what Osibisa used to call 'criss-cross rhythms that explode with happiness'. Try proctising it with your ever-expanding backing track.

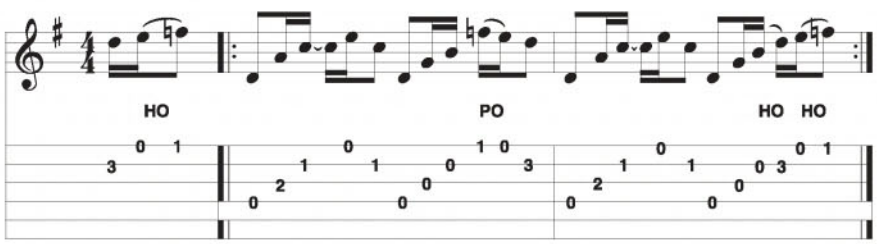
Whether you are playing this with a plectrum or fingerstyle, practice it until there's a flow, or dance, to your right-hand action. Left-hand fingerings are suggestions only, so check them out and then make up your mind. Play this at 12 bpm.



5 SMOOTH GROOVE — 4/4 TIME

Play the groove in Exercise 5 smoothly and in time to the backing tape and you will be merrily adopted by every Ghanaian family in town, for you are now playing Sikyi music. If you add a 'head' with a slur starting on the fourth beat of the intro, and a pulled-off tail on the next fourth beat, you will be playing the style as an Ashanti would really play it. We are using the mixolydian mode here, as the F is being kept natural, and this can be used as a tool for soloing.

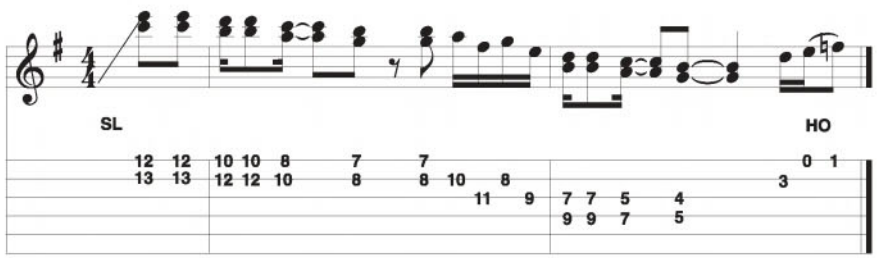
Try playing Exercise 5 an octave higher than written to get an ethnic Kora feel. Use your index finger as a capo at the 12th fret – or even try it in open position on a Nashville-tuned guitar. Suggested tempo is 110bpm.



6 END WITH AN INTRO — 4/4 TIME

Finally, Exercise 6 is a typical Palm Wine guitar solo intro, which you could join up very nicely to Exercise 5. The phrase is in thirds from the 12th position and moves down to the third position. This downward movement is characteristic of most African melodies (see Exercise 1). Note also how breaking away from the diad on the fourth beat adds more character to the line you're playing. The line also echoes the cyclical, non-resolving nature of Sikyi, which is typical of the vast majority of African music forms.

Do free to use the whammy bar on your guitar to slide into the notes to get a Sunny Ade 'Juju' feel. Again, a happy feel is vital before you can join it up with Exercise 5. Aim to play the whole thing at a tempo between 100-110bpm. Next time, we'll explore the joys of the Amponsah groove, a chordal structure responsible for a thousand songs, including Paul Simon's *Spirit Voices* and his *Rhythm Of The Saints* album.



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DRILLS FOR
THRILLS

Tap Tempo

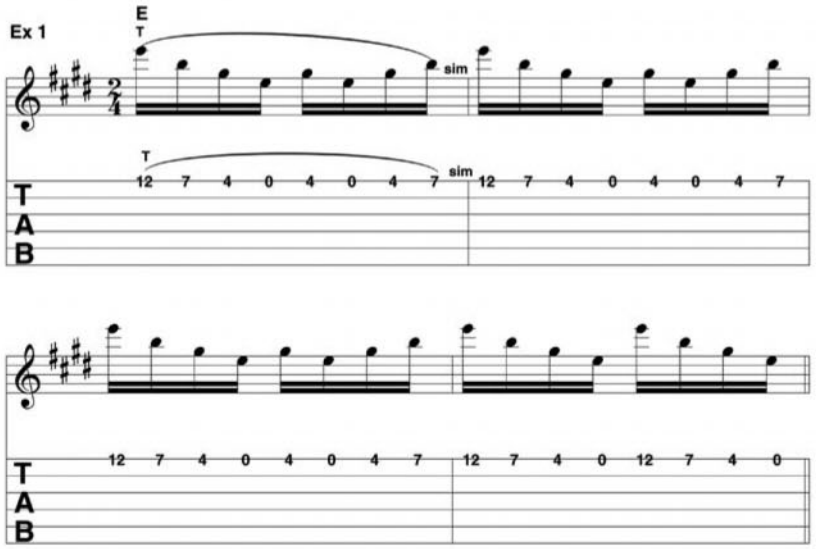
Welcome to the arpeggiated land of tapping: abandon all credibility, ye who enter here

And now for something completely different. After a couple of Boot Camps based on time-honoured scales and arpeggios, this month's guitar drill brings us bang up to date – or at least into the late '70s – with some tapped arpeggios. Though an accepted technique for decades, tapping was popularised by Eddie Van Halen in his instrumental *Eruption* from Van Halen I (1978). This striking innovation quickly became a cliché as everyone jumped on the bandwagon, but it's still a useful technique to master. However, we're going to pass on the hoary old tapped triplet in favour of a four-note pattern. The pattern explored in this Boot Camp involves three fretted notes, the highest one being tapped with a plucking hand finger, with the open top string at the bottom of the pattern. Mastering this technique enables wide-ranging note patterns to be played very fast and very smoothly.

1 E MAJOR PATTERN

2/4 TIME

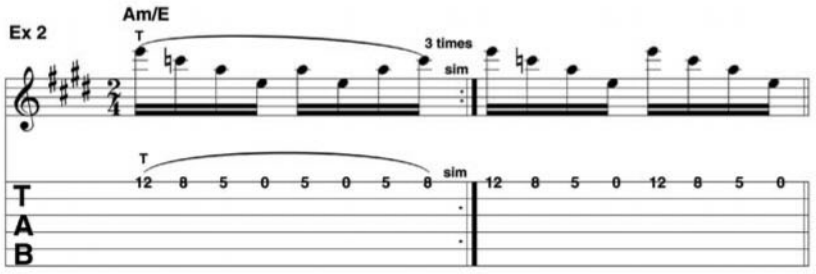
'T' means 'tap' with a plectrum hand finger – try the middle finger (the plectrum can still be held between thumb and index finger). All the notes are slurred, as indicated by the long curved 'slur' line, meaning none of the notes should be plucked in the conventional manner. Place the fretting hand fingers on their notes before starting the pattern – for example, the fourth finger on the seventh fret and the first finger at the fourth fret. When slurring to the next note with either the tapping finger or the fretting hand finger, make sure there's a downward component to the motion rather than just lifting the finger directly upwards in order to ensure a crisp slur to the next note. This particular pattern outlines an E chord. 'Sim' is short for 'simile' – that is, continue in a similar manner. The pattern in the first bar is repeated in bars 2 and 3. The descending part of the pattern is played twice in bar 4 to add some variety to the melody.



2 A MINOR PATTERN OVER AN E

2/4 TIME

The effect of the '3 times' indication is to make this exercise the same length as the pattern in Exercise 1. This pattern outlines an Am chord over an E in the bass or at the bottom of the chord, hence the Am/E chord indication.

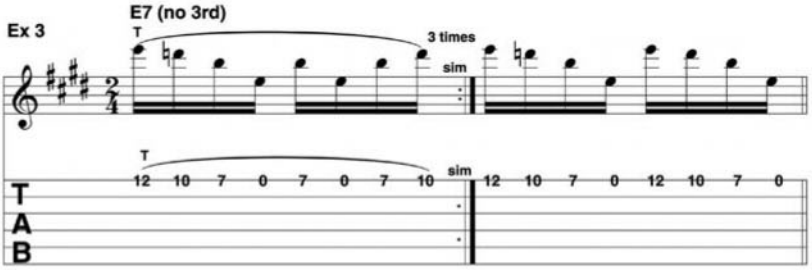


3 E7 NO THIRD PATTERN

2/4 TIME

This pattern outlines an E7 chord but without the third degree of the scale, G#, hence the E7 (no third) name. As in Exercise 2, the effect of the '3 times' indication is to make the pattern the same length as Exercise 1.

Once each pattern has been mastered, play the arpeggios in the chord progression of E, Am/E, E7 (no third), Am/E – and then repeat. As always, clarity and precision are more important than speed. However, once you've nailed both speed and accuracy, play as fast as possible. This pattern can be worked up to a significant speed... exactly how fast is up to you. When you can play this progression smoothly on the top string, play the same pattern on each of the other strings in turn, taking care not to sound any adjacent strings. Because of their different gauges, the pattern will feel slightly different on each string.



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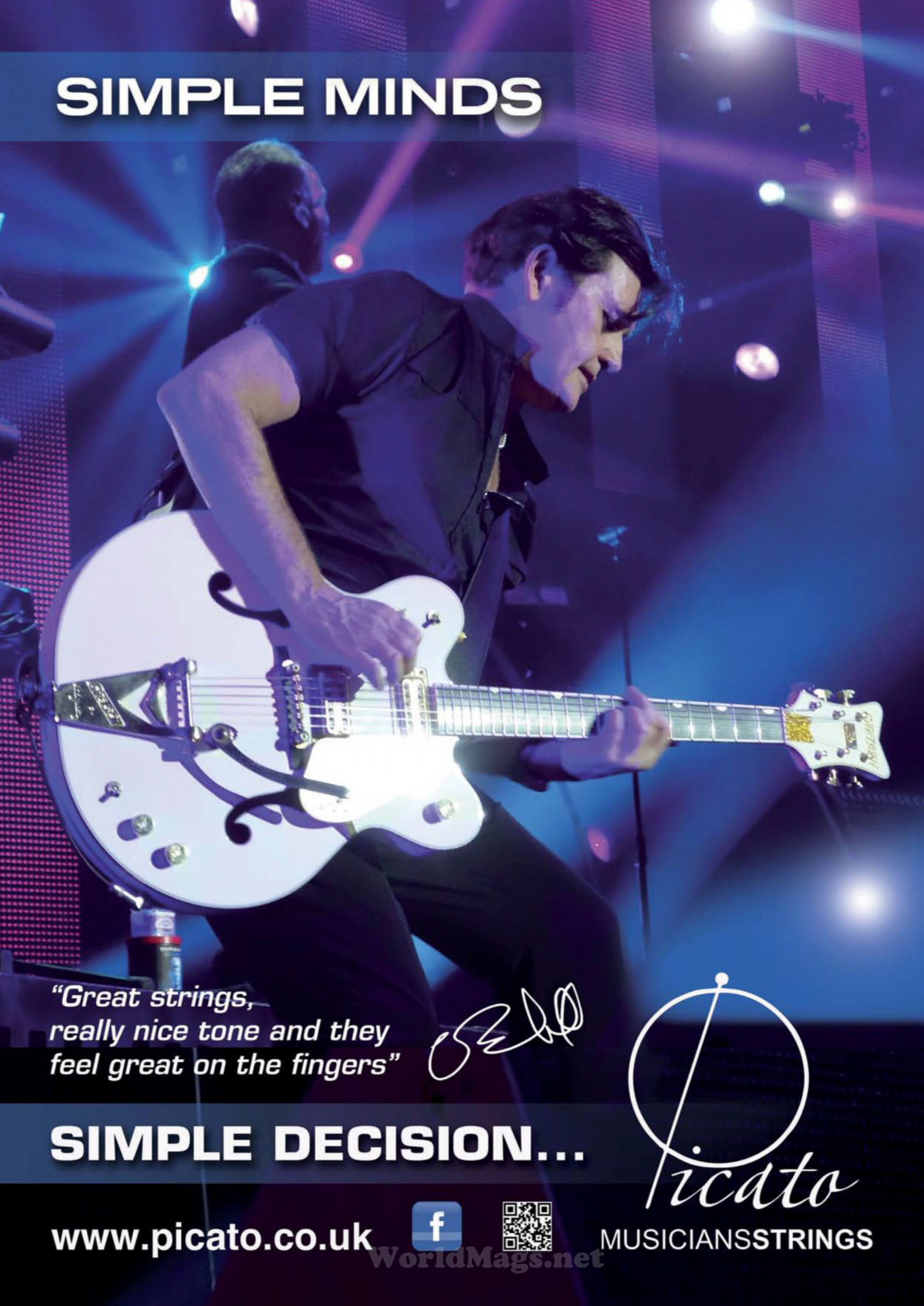

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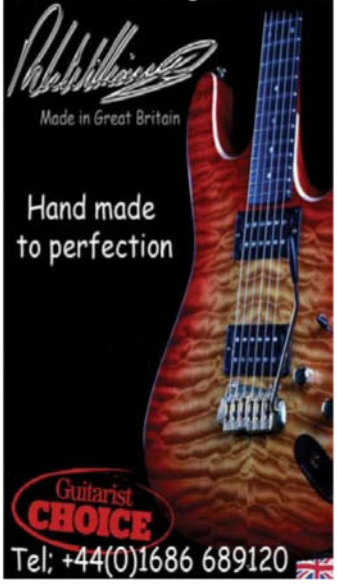

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FOR SALE

Marshall 1977 JMP 2203 100W top super lead master volume amplifier, good condition, can email pictures if interested, £650 ono. Tel: Glynn 07732 426052 /01257 424902, Wigan

Faith Jupiter high gloss jumbo acoustic, excellent condition, £500. Tel: Ian 07894 074755, West Cumbria

Gibson Custom Shop ES-339, vintage red, cream binding, Custom Shop case, all certificates, mint condition, £1350 ovno. Tel: Graham 0161 973 8406, south Manchester

Alhambra 9C classical guitar, solid cedar top, Indian rosewood back/sides, cedar neck w/ebony fingerboard in mint condition, c/w hiscox case, £675 ovno. Tel: Brian 07900 991312, Wolverhampton

Fender 1977 USA Stratocaster hardtail with original hardware, stripped paint to natural, incl Fender hard case, £995 ovno. Tel: 01386 861873

Fender Stratocaster 1996-97, American Series, Corona factory, ivory with micro-tilt neck, rosewood fingerboard and hard case, Immaculate condition. serial no: N6190732. Tel: Alan 01298 74208 after 6pm

Burny 1976 sunburst lp, lawsuit model, all-original with Hiscox case, brilliant guitar, fabulous tone, £695. Tel: Colin 07732 947131, Epsom

Gibson Paul Kossoff 1959 Les Paul Standard VOS, unmarked, brown case, coa, fantastic instrument selected from four, £4500 ono. Tel: 01943 465357

Roland GR-20 guitar synthesiser with GK-3 pickup, good condition, home use only, £180 ono. Tel: 01406 425058 Spalding, Lincs

Robin Greenwood custom-built 12-string acoustic guitar, sitka top, lacewood b/s, maple neck, pau rossa fingerboard/bridge, herringbone inlay, Hiscox case, £800. Tel: Keith 01722 328 668.

Music Man 210-65, '70s. Good working order and clean condition, reverb/tremolo foot pedal, classic Fender tones, £350. Tel: Keith 01722 328668.

Danelectro Cool Cat pedalboard with daisy chains and three pedals: Vibe, Distortion and Transparent Overdrive, excellent condition, £70. Tel: 01207 500939 Co Durham.

Schecter Diamond Series bowlback electro, flame top, Grovers, gig bag, excellent condition, great sound, have pics, £100 ono. Email: kennethlanglands@gmail.com, Beds

Gordon Smith Gypsy SS60 (semi solid), made in England, 1996, tobacco sunburst, never gigged, light use, superb condition, Hiscox hard case, twin humbucker model, £475. Tel: 07802 571278

Gibson Les Paul Standard plain top, 1999, in cherry sunburst, vgc, plays well, comes with Gibson hard case, £1500 ono. Tel: 07868 263587

Aria bass, two pickups, black body, rosewood fretboard, 2011 model, home use only, no dents or scratches, as new, £120. Tel: 01298 70369, Derbyshire

Fender 2004 Anniversary Strat, two-tone sunburst, maple board, gold hardware, pristine, £1350. Rothwell Hellbender, F1 booster, Arion Stereo Chorus, Boss power supply, pedals mounted, £180, home use only. Tel: Tony 01442 876740, Herts

Martin DC-Aura dreadnought cutaway 2008, solid rosewood b/s, solid sitka top, Aura system, excellent, contact Phil, £1600. Tel: 07951 951431 or email spacefish188@yahoo.com, Biggin Hill

Left-hand collection for sale, mostly Gibson and Fender. Tel: Simon 07887 952916 for details, Cumbria

Left-handed Fender USA Standard Strat, 2011, mint, white, R/N, £750 ono, PX considered. Fender Frontman 2x12 combo, as new, £120. Tel: 01723 447932, Yorks

Gibson Zebra Burstbucker pickups 1 and 2, as new, £120. Box boxed. Tel: 01733 840754, Coates, Cambs

Tech Soundsystems CTM-308 300W bass combo, 2x12" with tweeter, rare, hardly used, £320. Ashdown EB150 150W bass combo, 1x15", good, £150. Tel: Chris 07768 170750, Croydon

Gibson DC Pro 2006, stunning AAA figured top in flame red, chrome hardware, immaculate, incl. Gibson black case, £1295 ono. Tel: 01386 861873

Fender Hot Rod '52 Telecaster, butterscotch, custom vintage bridge pickup. SD mini humbucker, nitro, tweed case, case candy, £1200, photos. Tel: Simon 07949 192278, Surrey

Wechter Scheerhorn 6510-F resonator, square neck, fitted pickup, hard case, pristine condition, £400. Tel: 01923 442738, Watford area

Vox column speakers with chrome stands, 4x10" Fane 100W replacement speakers, original black covering, £500 ono. Tel: 020 8803 5337 London

Fender Stratocaster, 1986, Japanese, big headstock, creamy white, w/rosewood neck, outstanding condition, superb players guitar, bargain, £500. Tel: 07889 031482 or email mjd915@hotmail.co.uk, Bucks

Blackstar 2x10" 5W amp, two channel, ISF, reverb, brand new, never been used, £250. Tel: 01255 435967, Essex

Godin Multiac Jazz, spruce, excellent condition, with Godin hard case. £1000. Tel: 07738 227477, London

Vintage V56 guitar, antique white, mint, £100. Indie Super T type, black/grey, excellent, £125, buyer collects. Tel: Stephen 07954 138553, Preston

Gibson Les Paul Studio 1984, dot fretboard, fitted Dimarzios, £625 ono. Gibson 1967 EB-3, big issue – no original case, £2200. Tel: 07773 276815

Martin D-42, great sound, flagship of Martin dreadnoughts, bright inlays for the D-42, case upgraded to Geib 5 Star, all as new, £2800. Tel: 07686 263587

Gibson SG Robot (2008) cherry, Gibson hard case, both mint condition, very little playing, new battery, serial 024980311, £749 ono. Tel: Ross 075570 42548

Hofner President blonde 1959, No 13, in excellent condition for age, one pickup rewired, great example, £1200 ono. Tel: 07807 462909, Cambs

PRS SE Santana Limited Edition, quilt top with 25th anniversary hard case, three years old, excellent, £595, consider swap or p/ex quality guitar amp. Tel: Dave 07512 695626, Worcs

Epiphone Ultra 339, mint condition, £350. Ashdown bass Suboctave Plus Pedal £40. JSH GM55 'Elvis' mic £25. Tel: 07710 147305, Beds

Fender 1966 Jazz Special Bass, worn with age and use, photos available, sensible offers. Tel: 01572 771132, Leicestershire

Fender '57 reissue Strat, crafted in Japan 2003, fiesta red, immaculate, original, barely played, hard case, £650 Tel: 07802 571278

Vox VBM1 Brian May Special 10W amp, Ltd replica of Brain May's Deacy amp, excellent condition with manual and box, £100. Tel: Tom 01207 500 939, Co Durham

Marshall JMP Master Volume 50W combo 2x12", fantastic tone, £595. Orange Tiny Terror, £195. Tel: 01142 551785, Sheffield

Fender USA Telecaster, midnight candy, Stagg case in vgc, £750 ono. Tel: 01603 502090, Norwich

Seagull Maritime SWS Q1 electro-acoustic, solid top, solid rosewood b/s, Quantum electrics, mint, padded Seagull bag, 10W amp, £550. Tel: 0114 2831610 or 07948 418442, Sheffield

Orville by Gibson Les Paul Junior DC, TV yellow, Johnny Thunders style, £875. Japanese Fender Strat, red, £265. Seymour Duncan Antiquity P90, £75. Tel: Paul 01785 211769, Stafford

Fender Hot Rod Deluxe III, unused, £575 ono. Roland Cube 80XL £180, home use only. Takamine G Series electro-acoustic, £180, immaculate, hardly used. Tel: Tony 01442 876740, Herts

Tokai 1978 Silverstar S-type, cream with maple fretboard, made in Japan, brass nut and saddles, superb condition, £650. Tel: 01386 861873

Vox AC30 top boost reverb, 1979, McKenzie speakers, good condition with footswitch and cover, £750. Tel: John 01228 534889, Cumbria

Gibson Les Paul Trad, 2012, Heritage cherry sunburst, home use only, unplayed condition, great tone, Gibson hard case. £1300 ono. Tel: Graham 07766 170808, South Staffs

Catania Carmelo ERA1 thin archtop, £175. Salvador Ibanez ukulele in croc. case, £150. Dot fretboard Les Paul Studio, fitted DiMarzios, £595. Sunburst Thunderbird 76, £2700. Tel: 07773 276815

Ampeg L.Guitar V9/SSt Altec stack. V4/V2 stacks. Gu12 Jensen combo. All GWO documented, suit Stones or Faces tribute. Reasonable offers invited. Tel: 01179 770323, Bristol

PRS McCarty pickups, set of two, with chrome covers, £150. Steve Vai Bad Horsie Wah pedal, £50. Tel: Colin 07732 947131, Epsom

Collings I-35LC, fantastic, faded cherry, as new, mint condition. With deluxe original case, £2400. Tel: 0047 93035501 or email torsteina27@gmail.com

Orange Rocker 30 1x12" combo, footswitch, cover, light use, immac, £375 + p&p, ultimate Orange sound. Tel: Tony 01296 738486, tony.cox7@btinternet.com, North Bucks

Ibanez K5 Fieldy Signature Bass, mahogany body, walnut top and back, wenge/bubinga neck, rosewood fretboard, good condition with OHSC, £400. Tel: 07779 023883 or email pdommett@me.com

TwinStomp active A/B-Y pedal. as new, boxed, instructions, £85. Tel: 0114 2556185, Sheffield area

Marshall Vintage Modern 50W head and 425A 4x12" cabinet, purple, 2007 issue, fantastic vintage sound, padded Marshall covers, pedal, vgc, owner retiring, £695. Tel: 01943 465357

Godin Artisan TC Signature model, stunning amber quilt maple top, ebony board, gold hardware, Blade pickups, coil tap, immaculate, Godin case, £595. Tel: 01386 861873

Mesa/Boogie Transatlantic TA15 head, two channels, five modes, 5/15/25 watts. As new condition, with carry bag, footswitch, manual, £650. Tel: Steve 07933 799017 or email smallpot@virginmedia.com, Beds

Fender 1990 Clapton Stratocaster in candy apple green, owned from new. Consider p/x for MIM CP Jazzmaster, Robin Ranger or Duesenberg CC, £800. Tel: Brian 07904 184047

Gibson USA Les Paul Junior Billie Joe Armstrong, single cut, sunburst, all original, mint, Gibson BJA Leopard hard case. £1000, Jesse, London. Tel: 07472 694929 or email jesseappleton@hotmail.com

Gibson 1958 ES-125T, good condition for age, complete with hard case, £1250 ono. Tel: Clive 07721 458523 or email clive.hoops@virgin.net, Plymouth

Fender 2000 American Traditional Strat, serial N902272, black, near mint, never gigged, no case. £450. Fender M80 amp (non-valve), £140. Tel: 01322 347641, near Dartford, Kent

Gibson 1978 ES-175D vintage sunburst, vgc, original hard case

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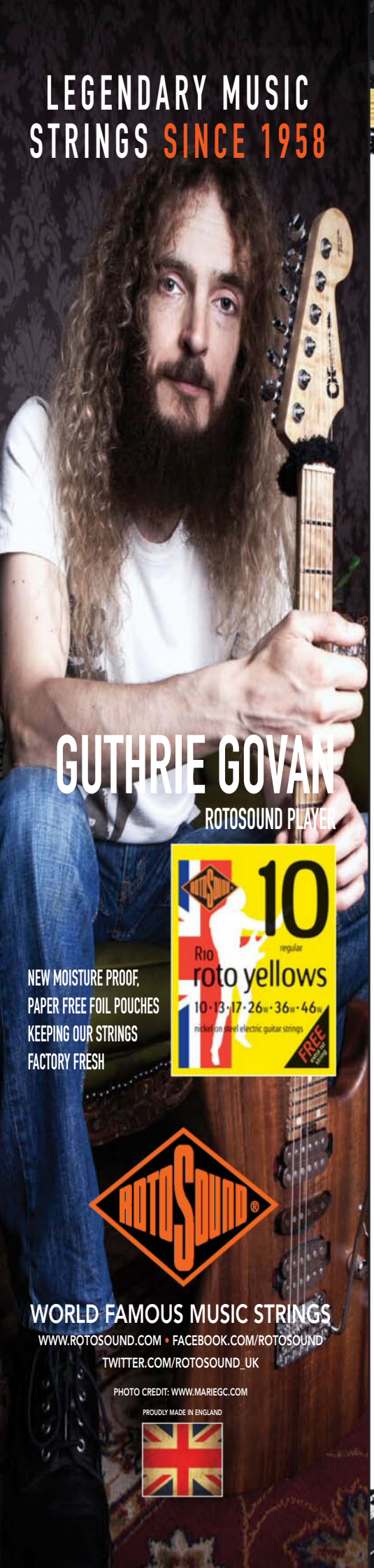

and receipt, £2500. Vox AC30, 12 months old, immaculate, gigged twice, £750. Celestion Greenback speakers, £650. Tel: 07980 035140, Sheffield

Fender 100W FM 2x12", as new, £130. Peavey Predator, £120. Squier Telecaster, rough looking but good, £90. Two 12" Celestion speakers, as new, £50. Tel: 07830 444829, Derby

Trace Elliot Pro UK bass rig, vgc: bottom cab 1x18" 300W, top 2x10" plus horn 200W, with 'tuff' covers. Two amps Trace Elliott with EQ, 150W. New, unused, Ashdown MAG 300W, offers. Tel: Steve 01256 780025, Basingstoke

Boss Micro Cube, effects and amp models, ideal practice or busking, excellent condition, mains/battery, £45. Also various Tele pickups from £15 each. Tel: 01429 296413, Teesside

Audition vintage amp, stored many years, piggyback model, trannie, needs a switch clean, 15 watts-ish, buyer collects, £50, Tel: 01582 882160, Beds

Trace Elliot GP7 4x10" bass combo, original British built, probably mid-'80s, £150. Call Graham 01634 232177

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Fender Vintage Reissue '57 Strat, two colour sunburst, Bare Knuckle pickups, home use only, tweed case, bridge cover, £800, photos. Tel: Simon 07949 192278.

Fender Strat, Custom Shop '62 Relic Tone Machine, surf green, rosewood board, John Cruz pickups, vintage brown case, candy, certificate, six months old. Save £700: £1850. Tel: 01255 435967, Essex

Fender Robert Cray Strat, hardtail, sunburst, mint, £550. Fender Lite Ash Tele, natural, mint, £350. Takamine EG334C electro-acoustic, mint with hard case, £400. Tel: Richard 02392 348487, Portsmouth

Orange MT20 Micro Terror amp and Orange PPC108 lead guitar head speaker cab, new, boxed, never used, £130. Tel: 07717 671744, Bristol

Peavey Rockingham semi-acoustic rockabilly archtop, sunburst, excellent condition, £295. Tel: Ian 07894 074755, West Cumbria

Various electric guitars for sale, mostly Fenders and Gibsons. Tel: 07887 952916 for info, South Cumbria area

Yamaha SG1000, made in Japan 1993, original hard case, brown sunburst with gold hardware, mint apart from one small ding to neck, £900. Tel: Mick 07802 571278, Northants

Camps Naci electro-acoustic guitar, left-handed, Fishman pickup, great condition, buyer collects, £250. Tel: 07791 219506 Thame, Oxon

Burns Marvin 40th Anniversary 2004, very little home use only, mint with all case candy, signed certificate, £950 ono. Tel: Steve 01246 280299, Chesterfield

Fender American Vintage reissue '52 Tele Special, 1999. Two colour sunburst, gold hardware, Tolex case, leather strap etc, mint, very rare, £1250. Tel: Mick 07802 571278, Northants

Gibson SG 61 Reissue, 2001, Heritage cherry, lyre vibrato, vgc, pics on request, with tan Gibson hard case, £1000. Email: kennethlanglands@gmail.com, Beds

Vintage 1964 Fender Musicmaster II, 100 per cent original with OHSC. Excellent for age with no issues. Case has a bump. £1200 ono. Buyer collect, Preston, Lancashire. Email: twentyhertz@twentyhertz.co.uk

WANTED

Fender soft-V neck for Baja Tele. Must be very good to new condition. Tel: 01429 296413, Teesside

Music Man 1x12" combo, 65W or 75W twin channel, other models considered. Tel: Peter 0208 977 7228

Vintage Paradise guitar. Txt/call: Andy 07944 651798 or email delavigne@btinternet.com

Fender Highway One Tele, pref sunburst, excellent condition. Tel: 01306 740841, Surrey

Award-Session Stockton amp wanted. Tel: 07887 972019, Lanarkshire

Brown-haired bassist for hard rock band. Must have long hair and be over 22. Contact Gismus@aol.com

Yamaha SG200, pearl white. Tel/txt: 07710 161598 or email Chris-r1968@hotmail.co.uk

Fender Tweed '50s Champ, Princeton or Deluxe amp, must be original. Tel: 0151 638 9567, Cheshire area

Egnator Rebel 30 combo wanted, also Roland-ready Strat, Mexican, white, must be good condition, pref London. Tel: Mick 020 8530 1208

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Soundtrack of my life

Adrian Vandenberg

This is one guitar player who knows what he likes – classic blues and rock guitar

Dutch guitar heroes lauded outside the lowlands are a rare breed, but Adrian Vandenburg's work with Whitesnake put him on the global map. Adrian's own outfit, Vandenberg, had success with the power ballad, *Burning Heart,* which brought him to the attention of Whitesnake honcho David Coverdale. Vandenberg joined up in 1986, and once aboard he co-wrote hits such as *The Deeper The Love* and *Now You're Gone*, and also supplied the iconic guitar solo on soft-rock super-hit *Here I Go Again*. He stayed with Coverdale until 1997, then took a sabbatical from music to concentrate on fatherhood and painting. After 16 years he's back with a new band, Vandenberg's Moonkings, and a self-titled record that blends peerless melodic composition with hard-hitting classic rock played through a host of mouth-watering vintage kit.

The Jimi Hendrix Experience

SMASH HITS

For me it started with Hendrix. *Smash Hits* was the one that blew me away. The power of his delivery! The first few notes of *Stone Free* kicks

your ass so hard, and the intro of *Hey Joe* is amazing. It's just a couple of notes and it's really clean, not blaring out of a stack of Marshalls – but its presence is stunning.

John Mayall With Eric Clapton

BLUESBREAKERS

I mean, jeez, man! A Les Paul through a Marshall. Bam! You got it. It was a great guitar sound, and he was only 22 or something at that time. I

realised later that some of it was note-for-note Albert and Freddie King, but Eric was still amazing. He never quite got that tone again, as far as I'm concerned.

Free

FIRE AND WATER

This album blew me away and became a thread throughout my entire life. I was fortunate enough to see Paul Kossoff play in my home town with

Back Street Crawler only a couple of weeks before he passed away and he was definitely my main influence in terms of attempting to squeeze emotion from just one or two notes.

Cream

WHEELS OF FIRE

If I had to name my favourite solo it would be Clapton's from the live version of *Crossroads* on this album. It's stunning, so flawless, and it tells a

story all on its own. An incredible band and a great sound. It's what we try to do with the Moonkings; no extra rhythm guitar behind the solos... we just let them breathe.

Queen

SHEER HEART ATTACK

When I was about 18 I was on German TV playing with a Dutch boogie-woogie band and I heard this unbelievable solo from the other side of the

dressing room area. It turned out to be Brian May running through the solo from *Killer Queen*. I've met him a bunch of times since – a true legend, yet such a humble guy.

Van Halen

VAN HALEN

The most influential guitarist after Hendrix, in my opinion. The impact of this album was huge. Every guitar played was completely shocked by it. I

know Eddie and he's just a no-nonsense guy who just loves to play guitar and have a beer. He's playful, comical and intense, and he's one of those guys who plays exactly like he is.

Stevie Ray Vaughan & Double Trouble

LIVE AT MONTREUX 1982 & 1985

With Stevie Ray it's all about capturing that wonderful, natural energy, and he was always totally consistent live. The purists didn't like him

at first, but he just grooved like a mofo. I'm a Hendrix man but Stevie gave *Little Wing* and *Voodoo Chile* his own textures, made them bounce and made them his own.

Jeff Beck

TRUTH/BECK-OLA

One of the first singles I bought was *Rock My Plimsoul* with *Hi Ho Silver Lining* on the B-side. I remember the album had the big apple on the

cover that reminded me of the Beatles. He's never stopped trailblazing, though. *Beck's Guitar Shop* is one of the only instrumental guitar albums I ever listen to.

ZZ Top

RHYTHMEEN

Billy Gibbons is the master of tone, timing and total coolness. This is from 1996, and I'm convinced there's a different drummer on it because Frank

Beard never sounded this good. Like Beck, Billy's a hot rod fan, and I was in a garage once where they both had a car in for work parked side by side. It seemed somehow symbolic.

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